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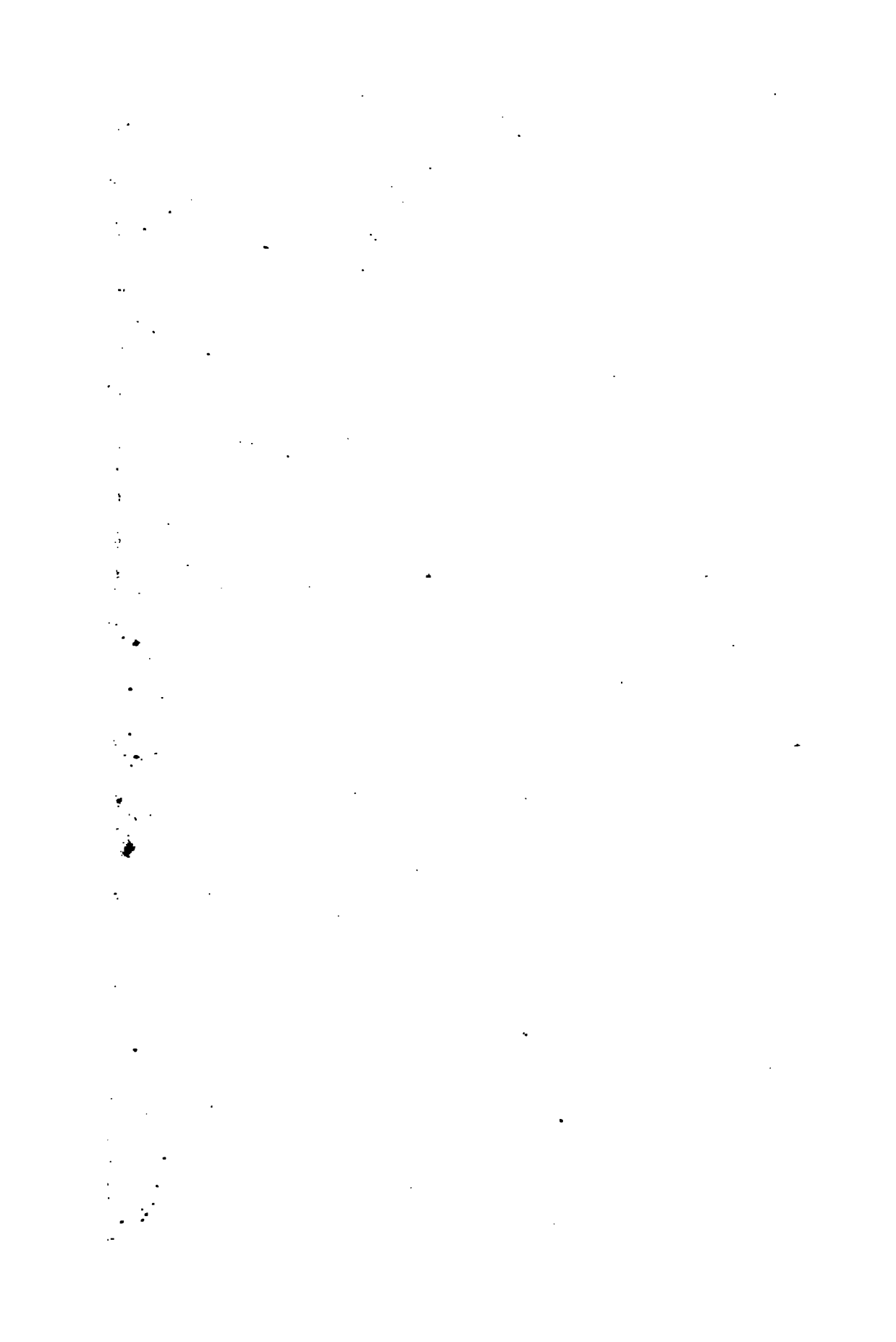


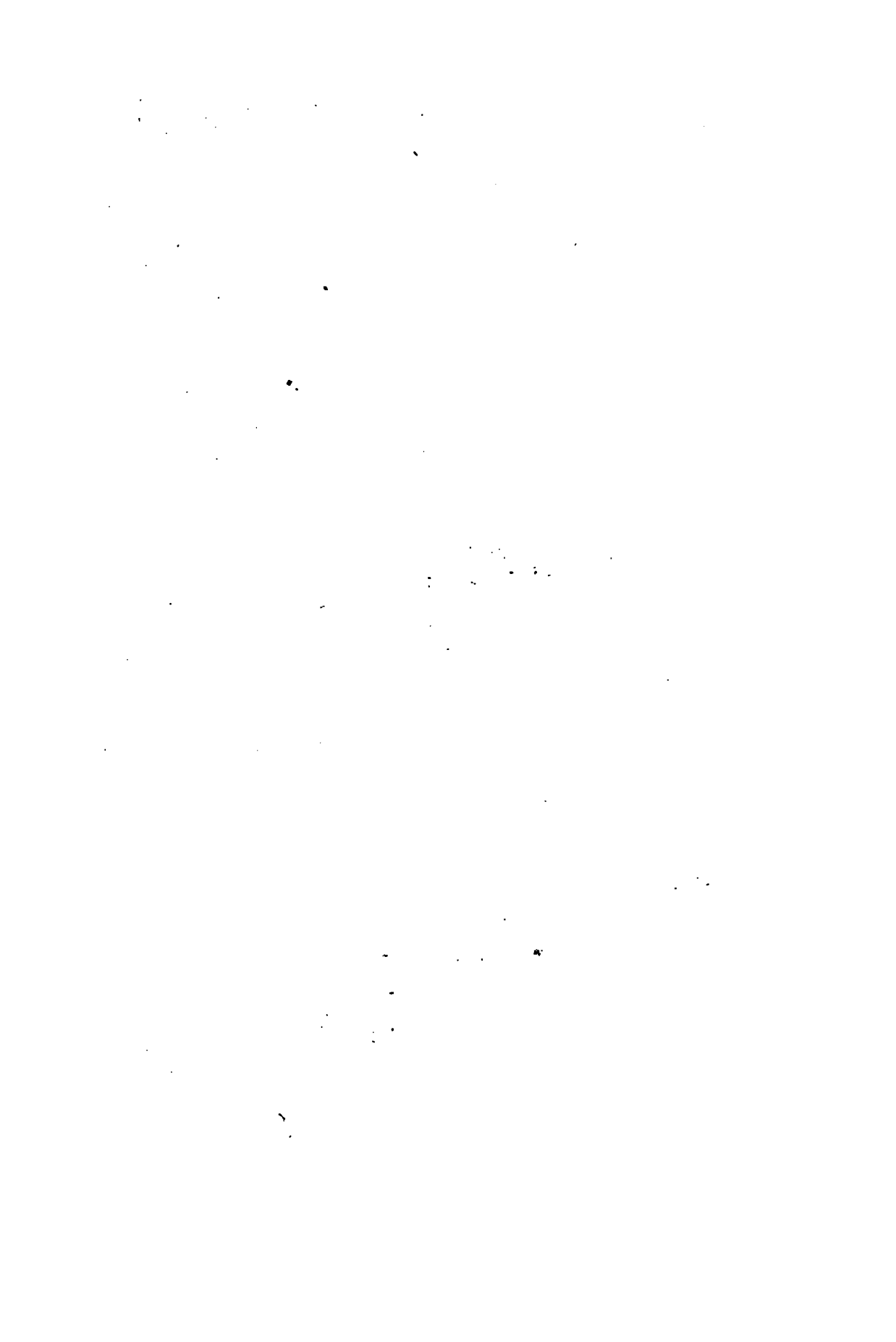
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EXPLANATORY DISCOURSES

ON

THE EPISTLES

In the Book of Common Prayer,

FOR EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR

AND

THE PRINCIPAL FESTIVALS

OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND:

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. WERNBURGH, BRISTOL

BY

THE REV. JOHN HALL, B.D.

RECTOR OF THE SAID PARISH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MDCCCXXXIX.



To the Memory
OF THE
REV. THOMAS TREGENNA BIDDULPH, A. M.
LATE MINISTER OF ST. JAMES'S, BRISTOL,
TO WHOSE KIND REVISION
THE FIRST VOLUME OF THIS WORK
AND THE AUTHOR'S PRECEDING PUBLICATIONS,
HAVE BEEN INDEBTED
FOR MANY VALUABLE CORRECTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS :
THIS TOKEN OF GRATITUDE
Is Inscribed
BY ONE WHO FOR MANY YEARS ENJOYED HIS FRIENDSHIP,
AND WHO DEEPLY FEELS THE LOSS
WHICH HAS BEEN SUSTAINED BY THE CHURCH OF CHRIST,
ESPECIALLY IN THIS CITY,
IN CONSEQUENCE OF HIS REMOVAL FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN.

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SERMON XXXI.

FOR THE

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

HEARERS AND DOERS.

James i. 22.

BE YE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOUR OWNSSELVES.

IN the Epistle for this day, a description is given of the different characters into which all who come to the house of God may be divided. The text marks the distinction which subsists between them, and the verses which follow contain illustrations of their character. The importance of hearing the word of God was pointed out in the Epistle for last Sunday; in which the apostle exhorts Christians to *be swift to hear, and to receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save their souls*. In the portion of scripture to which our attention is now to be directed, we may consider,

2 THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

First, The character given of those who are *hearers only*; and

Secondly, That of those who are also *doers of the word*; the consideration of which may lead us to see the importance of the exhortation of the text, as pointing out the danger there is of *deceiving our ourselves* in a matter which so nearly concerns us.

May the Holy Spirit be pleased to apply His words to our hearts, that we may be preserved from self-deception, and enabled to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*.

First, With regard to the characters of those who are *hearers only*, the apostle observes, *If any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was*. The word of God is here compared to a looking-glass or mirror, which gives a representation of the person who looks into it, and shows him what kind of appearance he has. In like manner the holy scriptures present us with an accurate account of, not the outward appearance only, but the internal state and character of the children of men. They show us what we are by nature and by practice. They describe to us our fallen state, and the source from whence it originated. That God created man upright; but he fell from his state of innocence, by transgressing

the commands of his Creator; and thus "brought death into the world and all our woe." For *by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*¹ The posterity of Adam inherited from their fallen parents a corrupt nature; his first-born son was a murderer; and ever since *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;*² he is *shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin;*³ he is *abominable and filthy* before God, and *drinketh iniquity like water;*⁴ yea, *every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.*⁵ Such is the representation which is given of man in the word of God. He who is a *hearer only*, may assent to the truth of the description, because it involves all mankind equally with himself; but he lays it not to heart. He may look into the Bible, and see that such are its statements. His conscience may tell him that he is a sinner against God, and exposed to the consequences of transgression, notwithstanding the palliations and excuses which he may make for himself. But the danger he is in of receiving the wages of sin, does not fill him with alarm, does not lead him to apply in earnest for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, to Him who has promised to bestow these blessings upon the suppliants at His footstool.

¹ Rom. v. 12. ² Gen. viii. 21; vi. 5. ³ Psalm li. 5. ⁴ Job xv. 16.

4 THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

It seems surprising that people can look at themselves continually in the glass of God's holy law, and yet habitually go away and forget it. But this is the case, it is to be feared, with the greatest number of the hearers of the word of God; and therefore our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of this description of hearers, in the first place, in His parable of the sower: *Those by the way side are they that hear, then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*⁵ While the word of God is preached, Satan is active in endeavouring to counteract its effect. He had rather that mankind should *turn away their ears from hearing the truth* altogether. But if they will hear it, as many do for various reasons unconnected with the desire of receiving spiritual benefit from it, his end is answered if he can persuade them to be *hearers only* and not *doers of the word*; to assent to its truth, but not to lay it to heart, so as to follow it up in their life and conduct.

Let us examine ourselves as to the benefit we receive from hearing the word of God. Oh! that we heard it at all times under the recollection that the word of God shall judge us at the last day, that we shall every one of us give account of ourselves before God respecting our hearing His word, and the reception which it meets with from us. Let us ask ourselves, Does the representation which we find of ourselves in the word

of God, humble us at His footstool? Has it led us to confess from the bottom of our hearts, as Job did, *Behold, I am vile; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes?*⁶ Unless our hearts are humbled before God in consequence of the declarations of His holy word, we are *hearers only*, who hear the word of God, without being benefited by it.

But if the description which it gives us of our awful state, as transgressors of His holy law, has humbled us before Him, the revelation of His mercy in Christ Jesus is calculated to bring joy and peace to the heart of the penitent sinner. The love of God in giving His only begotten Son to be the Saviour of the lost, and as the substitute of the guilty, to *bear our sins in His own body on the tree,*⁷ and to *magnify the law, and make it honourable*⁸ by His obedience to it in human nature; and the declaration made of His willingness to receive all that come to Him and seek an interest in His redemption, with a desire to obtain all the spiritual blessings that flow from it;—these are subjects which ought to excite our utmost gratitude, and to fill our hearts with praise and thanksgiving. What a lamentable thing is it to be *hearers only* of these important and glorious truths, and not to receive the unspeakable benefits which are conferred upon the humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵ Luke viii. 12. ⁶ Job xl. 4; xlii. 6. ⁷ 1 Peter ii. 24. ⁸ Isa. xlii. 21.

The word of God may be said to reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord Jesus; and by exhibiting Him as the model of infinite perfection, and *the chiefest among ten thousand*, the *altogether lovely*,⁹ it shows us what we ought to be, and what is meant by conformity to the Divine image. But many hear of this also without being interested by it. They behold it, and go their way, and forget *what manner of persons they ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness*.¹⁰ He that is a *hearer only*, is called, in verse 25, a *forgetful hearer*. He does not “mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the word of God; he does not treasure it up in his heart; but *goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth it*.

These persons are described in the text as *deceiving their own selves*. The same character is further spoken of in verse 26. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain*. Those who are hearers of the word of God *seem to be religious*, they are found among the worshippers of God, they sit before Him as His people sit, as though they were desirous of receiving the instruction of heavenly wisdom. If such persons, instead of receiving *with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save their souls, bridle not their tongues*, but take offence at

⁹ Cant. v. 10, 16. ¹⁰ 2 Peter iii. 11. ¹¹ 1 Thess. ii. 13; i. 5—7.

the word of God, and cavil and object to it, and speak against it, their hearing is to no purpose, their religious worship is of no avail. If we do not receive the word of the truth of the gospel with humility of mind, it will not profit us. The apostle Paul thanked God on behalf of the Thesalonians, that they received *the word which they heard of him, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in them that believe it*; for the *gospel came not unto them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*; and they *became followers of the Lord, and ensamples to all that believed*.¹¹ If any hear the word of God without thus receiving it; if they are *swift to speak* against it, instead of receiving the truth in the love of it, they are *deceiving their own selves*, the profession of religion which they make by coming to the house of God, is vain. Such is the awful declaration of the apostle. May the subject lead us to self-examination, that we may not deceive our own selves by having a name to live, and imagining ourselves to be the children of God, in consequence of making an outward profession of religion, if we are indeed dead to God, uninfluenced by His word, and living in disobedience to His holy will and commandments. We are to consider,

Secondly, The character given of those who are not only hearers, but also *doers of the word*. Re-

specting them the apostle goes on to say, *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* We may observe here the name which the apostle gives to the word of God. He calls it *the perfect law of liberty*. A law is a rule or direction given for the benefit of those who are subject to it. Such is the moral law, commonly called the ten commandments; and such is the whole volume of Divine revelation. It is a *perfect law*, as having been *given by inspiration of God*, and as it was given in order that thereby *the man of God should be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*¹² It is *the law of liberty*, inasmuch as by the knowledge of it, the children of men are set free from the dominion of sin and Satan; and by having respect to it, the children of God *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free;*¹³ and *being made free from sin, and become servants to God, they have their fruit unto or in holiness, and the end everlasting life.*¹⁴

The true Christian, who is not a hearer only, but a doer of the word, *looketh into this perfect law of liberty*. The word *looketh into* denotes a bending forward to ascertain accurately the state of the thing which is looked into. It is used for the disciples stooping down and looking earnestly

¹² 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. ¹³ Gal. v. 1. ¹⁴ Rom. vi. 22. ¹⁵ Isa. lvii. 12.

into the sepulchre for the body of the Lord Jesus, to ascertain for themselves whether it was really there or not, after they had heard the report of His resurrection. When we speak of any matter having been looked into; we mean that proper inquiry has been made respecting it, and correct information obtained on the subject. Thus it is that the Christian *looketh into the perfect law of liberty*. He searches the scriptures diligently, he reads the Bible with attention, and with prayer that he may have a right understanding of the doctrines which it teaches, and the precepts which it inculcates; *for learning*, that he may know the things that belong to his everlasting peace; *for reproof*, or conviction of his sinfulness, that he may be led to look for pardon through the blood-shedding and death of his Redeemer; and to implore the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit to help in time of need; *for correction*, that being converted *from the error of his way*, he may walk humbly with his God and uprightly before Him; *for instruction in righteousness*,¹² that receiving Divine admonition, his ways may be so directed, that he may keep the statutes of his God, while he depends upon the righteousness of Christ alone, as the ground of his acceptance with *the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy*.¹⁵ In the same manner the word preached is examined into, it is heard with attention and with prayer,

with a desire to profit by it, to receive the instruction of heavenly wisdom, to mix faith with it, to be *nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine*, to hold fast that which is good, to grow up into Christ Jesus in all things.

And further, the true Christian not only *looketh into the perfect law of liberty*, but he *continueth therein*. It is not a sudden fancy, which he takes up in a moment, and as speedily relinquishes; but he patiently continues his search of the sacred volume, and his attendance on the means of grace, that through the blessing of God, he may know more and more of Divine truth, and may be influenced by it to every good word and work. As it was said to Joshua, *This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein*:¹⁶ So the word of God is *a lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path*,¹⁷ to guide his feet into the way of *peace*¹⁸ and salvation. He is *not a forgetful hearer*, he endeavours to remember it, he desires to have it written upon his heart, he prays that his memory may be sanctified to retain the precious truths of the everlasting gospel, that his dependence upon his Saviour may be increased, and his expectations from the Spirit of grace may be enlarged. And the consequence is, he becomes a

¹⁶ Jos. i. 8. ¹⁷ Ps. cxix. 105. ¹⁸ Luke i. 79. ¹⁹ John vi. 28, 29; iv. 23.

doer of the work. When our Lord Jesus Christ was asked by those who followed Him, *What shall we do that we may work the works of God?* He answered, *This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.*¹⁹ This is the great work which is done by him *who looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein.* By the knowledge which he obtains of the word of God, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he is led to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to hope for pardon through His blood, to depend for acceptance with God upon His righteousness, to expect every needful blessing through His intercession, and especially the grace of the Holy Spirit, to influence his heart and make him fruitful in every good work.

It is added, *This man shall be blessed in his deed*; not for his doings, but in them. While he is endeavouring to perform them in obedience to the will of his heavenly Father, he *shall be blessed* with the enjoyment of the love of God in his soul, as a foretaste of the blessedness which awaits him hereafter in heaven. Thus, while he makes use of the means of grace, the grace of God shall be manifested to his soul, making the means effectual for the end designed by them, the promotion of the glory of God, and his own consolation and blessedness. Let us seek to enjoy this comfort and happiness in the use of the privileges with which we are favoured.

12 THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

The apostle adds another characteristic of the *doers of the word*: *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* The possessors of *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father*, are those who are described by our blessed Saviour as *the true worshippers who worship the Father in spirit and in truth.*¹⁹ These persons will be imitators of God as His beloved children. They will therefore be kind and compassionate to the needy and destitute, *the fatherless and widows in affliction.* And they will be careful to avoid the wickedness which is practised by the people of the world. These are two points of the Christian character to which particular regard is needful. While others are hard-hearted, the Christian is to be kind and compassionate. The most destitute are to receive the greatest share of his compassion. And while he is compassionate towards others, he is to be vigilant over himself, that he may not be defiled by the evil with which he is surrounded. Such is the character drawn by the apostle of the *doers of the word.*

Let us now consider the exhortation in the text, by which the importance of avoiding self-deception is enforced upon us. *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own-selves.* It becomes us to examine ourselves, and

to ascertain which of these characters truly belongs to us. It is said of those who are *hearers only*, that they are *deceiving their own selves*. The word in the original language is exceedingly expressive. It means, satisfying the mind by erroneous and inconclusive reasoning. And is not this the way in which the more thoughtful part of those who are *hearers only* are accustomed to act? They substitute the means for the end. They think it enough to come to the house of God, and be present during Divine worship. They seem to imagine themselves to be merely spectators of the service which is performed, as though they had no personal interest in it. They do not implore the blessing of God to rest upon them in the use of the ordinances which He has appointed for the edification of His waiting people; but consider all that passes as a matter of course; and imagine that by their attendance in His house of prayer they have done their duty; and that nothing more is requisite. This satisfies their minds, and causes them to entertain a higher opinion of themselves than of others, who neglect these outward duties. Thus they deceive their own selves; and if Divine mercy prevent not, they carry on this self-deception to the end of their lives; priding themselves on their religious character, because of their attendance on the means of grace; while they neglect the great salvation, which it is the object of the

14 THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ordinances of the house of God to bring home to their hearts and minds. How dreadful is it to think of people *deceiving* their *ownelves*, to their eternal undoing. Yet it is to be feared that this is the case with many who hear the word of God. What searchings of heart should the idea of the possibility of such a thing produce in the minds of all who attend on the ordinances of His house; what fear lest, after having used the means of grace, and having had the hope of glory set before us, we should come short of receiving the eternal blessing. Our Lord Jesus Christ has spoken of some who should say in the great day of God, *We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets*; and should therefore ask Him, *Lord, Lord, open to us*, admit us into Thy heavenly kingdom. But *He shall* answer and say unto them, *I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.*²⁰ Outward privileges profit not, unless the end designed by them be answered. Many heard Christ Himself preach, who heard in vain, who were *hearers only, deceiving their ownelves*. This was the reason why He said so frequently, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear;*²¹ by which He called upon His hearers to consider the meaning of the important words which He addressed to them. Let us pray that we may not be *hearers*

²⁰ Luke xiii. 26, 27; viii. 8.

²¹ Romans ii. 13.

only, not forgetful hearers, deceiving our ourselves, but that we may be *doers of the word*, who lay to heart the solemn truths which it presents to our minds, and seek grace to live in obedience to what God has commanded. It is *not the hearers of the law who are just before God, but the doers of the law who shall be justified*²¹ in His sight. These lay to heart the word of God; they inquire diligently what is His will which is revealed in it; they continue to wait upon God in the use of the means of grace; they *worship Him in spirit and in truth*; they watch over their hearts, their words, and their conduct; they seek grace from God to enable them to resist all sin; and being made partakers of Divine mercy, they imitate the example of their heavenly Father, as they have opportunity, in their conduct towards their fellow-creatures, and avoid every thing that is contrary to His holy will and commandments.

It becomes us to inquire, Which of these characters belongs to us individually? Are we *hearers of the word* only, who are *deceiving our ourselves* by an outward attendance on the means of grace, without considering the end for which God has been pleased to communicate to mankind the revelation of His will? or, Are we *doers of the work* of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, which God has enjoined upon His people; *doers of the word*, who *shall be blessed in our deed*? If we are *hearers only*, we may have

our reward in this world, in the applause of men, in the approbation of our fellow-creatures for the regularity of our external deportment; which is all that many propose to themselves, in reality, by an attendance on the house of God. But we are *deceiving our ourselves* if we expect the Divine blessing to be vouchsafed us, when our hearts are not truly given up to God, and our lives devoted to His service. Our *religion* must be *pure and undefiled before God and the Father*, in order to be acceptable to Him. Our hearts must be purified by faith in Christ; we must *worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*; we must be *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*; if we would fulfil the duties enjoined upon us in the word of God; and not deceive ourselves by an empty profession. May the privilege we enjoy of hearing the word of God answer this end. May we not only call Christ, *Lord, Lord*, but also do the things which He has commanded; that *our light may so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven*; and that we may be enabled to rejoice in hope, that when we have done with all things here below, *an entrance shall be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.

SERMON XXXII.

FOR THE

ASCENSION DAY, OR HOLY THURSDAY.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

Acts i. 10, 11.

AND WHILE THEY LOOKED STEDFASTLY TOWARD HEAVEN AS HE WENT UP, BEHOLD TWO MEN STOOD BY THEM IN WHITE APPAREL; WHICH ALSO SAID, YE MEN OF GALILEE, WHY STAND YE GAZING UP INTO HEAVEN? THIS SAME JESUS, WHICH IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN.

THE ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, forty days after His resurrection from the dead, is one of the wonderful circumstances respecting Him which we are accustomed annually to commemorate. The account of it, which is given by St. Luke in the beginning of

his history of the Acts of the Apostles, is appointed by our church to be read instead of the Epistle for this day. The Evangelist commences with referring to the account which he had before written of the principal transactions in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Addressing the person to whom he had inscribed his previous narrative, he says, *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up.* Who this Theophilus (whose name signifies friend, or lover of God) was, there is no means of ascertaining; and it is of no importance, as the truth of the narrative is in no way connected with it.

The Evangelist had closed his gospel history with an account of the Lord Jesus having been *carried up into heaven; being parted from His disciples, while He blessed them.* He here recapitulates the events which had taken place previous to that transaction. *He was taken up, after that He, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen.* He had commanded them to preach *repentance and remission of sins in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem;* and had promised to shed forth the Holy Ghost upon them, to qualify them for the office which they were to sustain, which was accordingly accomplished on the day of Pentecost. It is repeated that our Lord Jesus Christ had *showed Himself alive after His passion*

to His apostles, *by many infallible proofs*, which could not possibly be mistaken, *being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. Some accounts of His conversations with them are given by the different Evangelists. He was seen by them ten or eleven times during these forty days; five times on the day of His resurrection, and as many times subsequently; some have supposed that He appeared on each Lord's day previous to His ascension.

Of the occurrences of that day, the Evangelist proceeds to make mention; that Jesus *being assembled with His disciples, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me*. This was His last injunction to His apostles, that they should not leave the city of Jerusalem until full proof should be given to them of His almighty power, by the fulfilment of the promise which He had made, of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them. *For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence*. John the Baptist had made the same observation, that He who was to come after him should *baptize His disciples with the Holy Ghost*, as a proof of His Divine power and glory.

As there doubtless was something extraordinary about the appearance and manner of the Lord Jesus on this occasion, *When they therefore*

were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? They were looking for a temporal kingdom to be set up by the Messiah, of which they had frequently before expressed their expectation. But as it was a spiritual kingdom which He intended to set up, *He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.* Future worldly aggrandisement was not the object upon which their desires were to be fixed any longer. A more noble and useful course was marked out for them, as the messengers of the glad tidings of salvation to a lost world. *Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* They were to go and teach all nations, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. This was a more important office for them to sustain, than any station of worldly aggrandizement, to which they might previously have expected to be advanced by their Messiah.

When He had thus declared to them their future destiny, or as it is said, *When He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.* They saw Him gradually rise from the ground, and ascend towards the sky, until a cloud obscured

Him from their view. *And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up*, astonished at so unexpected a sight; *behold, two men stood by them in white apparel*, two of the heavenly host who had been sent to call their attention more particularly to the subject; *which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.* Here they were directed thenceforward to have their *conversation in heaven*, whither their Lord and Master was gone; and also from thence to look for their Saviour to appear again, to take to Himself His kingdom in His own due time. Let us consider,

First, Some of the leading illustrations and references to the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, in other parts of the holy scriptures.

Secondly, The manner in which the disciples of Christ were affected by His ascension, when they witnessed it. And

Thirdly, The improvement which the angels directed them to derive from it.

May that Divine Spirit, by whom the records of truth were indited, give us wise and understanding hearts, that we may receive the truth in the love of it, and seek from our risen and exalted Saviour those blessings which He has promised to bestow upon His waiting people. We are to notice,

First, Some of the leading illustrations and references to the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are contained in other parts of the holy scriptures. The illustrations of it are to be found in the narratives of other similar events therein recorded. There are two other instances of this kind mentioned in the Old Testament; of which Enoch and Elijah were the subjects. The record respecting the former of these persons is in very few words; *He was not, for God took him.*²² A commentary is, however, given in the epistle to the Hebrews, from which we gather that he was taken up into heaven much in the same manner that our Saviour was. The apostle says, *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*²³ The word *translation* denotes a removal from one place to another. *God took him* in the same way that He afterwards took Elijah. The manner in which Elijah was taken up into heaven, is recorded in the first lesson for the evening service on Ascension Day. We there read, that *it came to pass as Elijah and Elisha went on and talked, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, and Elisha saw him no more.*²⁴

²² Gen. v. 24.²³ Heb. xi. 5.²⁴ 2 Kings ii. 11, 12; 3, 5.

The ascension of Elijah appears to have been witnessed by Elisha alone, although the sons of the prophets, both at Bethel and Jericho, seem to have had some previous intimation that such an event would take place on the day that it did occur; as they gave notice that the Lord would take him away on that day.⁶⁶ The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ took place in the sight of His apostles, whom He had chosen. Their names are mentioned on their return to Jerusalem from the mount of Olives, for the purpose of showing that they were all present on this occasion.

The ascension of Enoch may be considered as an illustration of that of our Lord Jesus Christ, since it afforded a confirmation of the truth of his prophecy, recorded by St. Jude: *Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.* In this prophecy the second coming of Christ is foretold in a manner similar to the declaration in the text; and one of the purposes of it is stated, namely, to *take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁶⁷

The ascension of Elijah may be considered as an illustration of that of our Lord Jesus Christ, with respect to the blessings bestowed

upon His church and people in connexion with it. Just before his ascension, Elijah said to Elisha, *Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.* And Elisha said, *I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.* And he said, *Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.*²⁵ And accordingly it was afterwards said that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha. So, likewise, the last promise of our blessed Saviour to His apostles was, *Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence; for, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; and ye shall be endued with power from on high.*²⁶ Thus then the visible ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven affords an assurance to His enemies, that when He shall come again, *they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power;* and to His friends, His believing people, that He will come to own them as the children of God, and to bless them by taking them to be ever with Himself, in His eternal kingdom and glory; for *He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day.*²⁷

But we find not only these illustrations of the subject in the Old Testament; there are also

²⁵ 2 Kings ii. 9, 10. ²⁶ Luke xxiv. 49. ²⁷ 2 Thess. i. 8, 9, 10.

direct references to it, particularly in the book of Psalms. In the twenty-fourth Psalm it is asked, *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in His holy place?* And in reference to the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, proclamation is twice made, *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in; the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, the Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.* In the forty-seventh Psalm it is said, *God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.* In the sixty-eighth Psalm He is addressed, *Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, Thou hast received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.* So also in the eighth Psalm it is said to the Lord God, *Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned Him with glory and honour;* which the apostle quotes to the Hebrews, in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, as *passed into the heavens*, after having suffered for the sins of mankind. And in the epistle to the Ephesians, the passage in the sixty-eighth Psalm is said to refer to Him as having *ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things*, or that He might dispense the riches of His grace to all the needy suppliants at His footstool, that out of His fulness they might all receive even grace for grace, a continually renewed supply according as their necessity required.

He ascended to heaven in human nature, to take possession of the throne of His glory. St. Peter says, *He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*²⁸ *He is Lord of all.*²⁹ *God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord in the glory of God the Father,*³⁰ or that He is glorified with that glory which He had with the Father before the world was;³¹ the manhood being also united unto God. The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ in human nature into heaven, was a sufficient proof of His being the *Lord of all, the Lord of hosts, the King of glory*; or that He has *all power in heaven and earth*. As the risen and exalted Saviour of mankind, He is the supreme Governor of the universe; His kingdom ruleth over all. The Divine proclamation therefore is, *Kiss the Son*, or submit to His authority, *lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, if His wrath be kindled, yea, but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him;*³¹ for He is set as *King upon His holy hill of Sion, and the heathen, or all the nations of the world are given to Him for His inheritance, and*

²⁸ 1 Peter iii. 22. ²⁹ Acts x. 36. ³⁰ Phil. ii. 10, 11. ³¹ Psalm ii. 12, 6, 8.

*the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.*³¹ The kingdoms of the world belong of right to Him, and those who do not submit themselves to His sway, will hereafter be called to appear before His judgment seat, to answer for their rebellion against Him.

The dominion which He exercises is, however, a spiritual dominion over the hearts and minds of those who are His subjects. It is a dominion which does not interfere with that of temporal princes, though it is above them all; for *all dominions shall serve and obey Him.*³² But as a spiritual dominion it is over *the spirits of all flesh.* We find our blessed Saviour addressing His heavenly Father at the close of His earthly career, *Thou hast given Thy Son power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him; and this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*³³ Or, as the apostle John observes, *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son; he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*³⁴

The inquiry which this subject should lead us to make, then, is, Do we truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is our hope of eternal life founded upon His obedience unto death for the pardon of

³² Dan. vii. 27. ³³ John xvii. 2, 3, 5. ³⁴ 1 John v. 11, 12; iii. 2.

our sins, and our restoration to the favour of God? It was the object of His great humiliation to do and to suffer all that was needful for the reconciliation of sinners unto God. And it is because of the work of redemption having been completed by Him, that He is *highly exalted*, and has *a name above every name*. Let us then submit ourselves to His authority, and beseech Him to give us those gifts which He is now exalted to bestow upon His church and people, to give us His Holy Spirit, that we may truly believe in and obey Him; that we may rejoice in Him as our King and our Lord; and "that like as we do believe Him to have ascended into the heavens, so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell." And thus, being the subjects of His spiritual kingdom, we shall be prepared for His coming again, whenever that great and glorious event may take place. We are to observe,

Secondly, The manner in which the disciples of Christ were affected by His ascension into heaven, when they witnessed it. They were filled with wonder and amazement; for a most astonishing event it truly was; such as in its particular circumstances had never been seen before. They saw Him gradually rise from the mount of Olives into the air, assuming, probably, such an appearance as He had before displayed to three of them, when *He was transfigured before*

*them, and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.*³⁵ They saw Him thus ascend from them into heaven, until *a cloud received Him out of their sight*, and they could see Him no longer. That He assumed a glorious appearance of this description, we have reason to think from the references made to something of this kind in the epistles. St. Paul says, *He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body.*³⁶ And again, *As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*³⁷ And St. John observes, *When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*³⁸ The gazing wonder of the apostles at the ascension of their Lord and Master into heaven, was repressed by the angels who stood by them. They said, *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?* intimating that a mere act of astonishment would do them no good. It may, perhaps however, be in reference to this very act, that the apostle says to the Corinthians, *We all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*³⁸ Their beholding the ascension and glorious appearance of the Lord Jesus had no transforming effect upon them; but when He shall appear again, His glory, shining

³⁵ Matt. xvii. 2. ³⁶ Phil. iii. 21. ³⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 49. ³⁸ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

upon His believing people, will cause them to reflect it, as a mirror upon which the sun shines reflects the light of that glorious luminary. The effect produced by the angelic admonition seems to have been, as the Evangelist records, *They worshipped Him*. Their admiration was turned into adoration. This example is worthy of our imitation. It becomes us to worship and adore our ascended Lord and God. The angels, however, directed them to derive improvement from the event, rather than to gaze up to heaven with a prying curiosity. This improvement is the

Third thing to be noticed. They said, This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. This is a subject on which there are many remarkable statements in the word of God. To the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, His apostles have given abundant testimony; and He Himself also frequently spoke of it in the most solemn and forcible language; a specimen of which may be found in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of St. Matthew.

In similar language the beloved disciple, St. John, speaks of it. *Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him; even so, Amen.*³⁹ So likewise St. Peter declares, *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the*

*which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.*⁴⁰ And St. Paul says, *The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God.*⁴¹ And again, *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels, in flaming fire.*⁴²

These passages of the holy scriptures show sufficiently the manner in which the Lord Jesus will come again. His ascension into heaven in the sight of His astonished disciples, was to them an assurance of His second coming; and they have left their testimony on record for our instruction, that we may learn to live in expectation of it, as they did. So the apostle Peter declares expressly: *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.*⁴⁰ This is what we are to learn from the consideration of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven.

Let us then ask ourselves, Is our diligence exercised on these subjects? Are we giving diligence to make our calling and election sure?⁴⁰ Are we at peace with God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we rely on His obedience unto death for our pardon and reconciliation

⁴⁰Rev. i. 7. ⁴¹2Pet. iii. 10, 14; i. 10. ⁴²1Thess. iv. 16. ⁴³2Thess. i. 7.

with God? Do we walk humbly with God, being accepted with Him through His beloved Son? Do we dread being *led away with the error of the wicked*, to walk in a way that is not good? Are we anxious to be *stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*?⁴³ This is the spirit and disposition which it becomes those to cultivate who are *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*,⁴³ if they would be acceptable to Him, and blessed by Him. Then, however dreadful His appearance may be to His enemies, to the ungodly, as Enoch so long since foretold; however terrible it will be to them *that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*;⁴⁴ we shall *not be ashamed before Him at His coming*.⁴⁵

Let us implore from our exalted Saviour, as Elisha asked, when his master was to be taken from him, a double portion of His Spirit to be poured upon us, and to rest upon us and abide with us; to influence and actuate us continually to do His will all the days of our sojourning here upon earth, and to *confirm us unto the end, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*;⁴³ “that when He shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto Him in His eternal and glorious kingdom;” *and so be ever with the Lord.*

⁴³ 1 Cor. xv. 58; i. 7, 8. ⁴⁴ 2 Thess. i. 8. ⁴⁵ 1 John ii. 28.

SERMON XXXIII.

FOR THE

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

THE END OF ALL THINGS.

1 Peter iv. 7.

THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND, BE
YE THEREFORE SOBER, AND WATCH UNTO
PRAYER.

THE Epistle for this day seems to have been selected in reference to the admonition given to the disciples of Christ, while they witnessed His ascension into heaven, that He should *come* again, or descend from heaven, *in like manner as He was seen* going up *into* it. As the time when this event will take place is unknown, the members of the church of Christ are to live in constant expectation of it. The manner in which they are to conduct themselves while they are sojourning on earth, is here described, together with the end which they are to propose to themselves, the promotion of the glory of God; while to their

exalted Redeemer they are to give praise and thanks, and to submit themselves to His authority as the Lord of all, *who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God*, or invested with almighty power, *angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him*; and therefore *praise and dominion* are to be ascribed to Him *for ever and ever*.⁴⁶ The ascension of Christ into heaven in the sight of His astonished disciples, is to be regarded as affording an assurance of the fulfilment of His promise, that He will come again with power and great glory, and will then appear as the Judge of all the earth, before whom every individual of the human race shall give account of himself for *the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad*; when He will bless His believing people, and banish His enemies from His blissful presence for evermore. To this second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the expectations of the primitive Christians were much directed. They are described as serving *the living and true God, and waiting for His Son from heaven*,⁴⁷ as looking for *that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*,⁴⁸ as having their conversation in heaven, *from whence also they looked for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*; as looking for and hasting unto *the coming of the day of God*.⁴⁹

⁴⁶1 Pet. iii. 22; iv. 11. ⁴⁷1 Thess. i. 9, 10. ⁴⁸Titus ii. 13. ⁴⁹2 Pet. iii. 12.

The text is an exhortation founded upon that expectation; and it is followed by Divine counsel as to the manner in which it becomes those to live and act, who profess to be looking forward to so great an event; to whom it is promised that *unto them that look for Him He shall appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.* Under the impression of the solemnity of this subject, let us consider the exhortations given us in the Epistle for this day, praying for the grace of the Holy Spirit to be vouchsafed to us, to apply His blessed word to our hearts, for our edification and admonition, and to the glory of His holy name. Let us notice in the

First place, the solemn warning with which the text commences, *The end of all things is at hand.* This is true with regard to every one of us as individuals, whether it be true or not comparatively with regard to the world in general. *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.* As individuals we know not the day of our death. How often does death come suddenly, unexpectedly, with little previous notice; perhaps a few days', or a few hours' illness may precede it; perhaps none at all. In such cases a degree of alarm is excited for a short time among those who have witnessed the suddenness of the decease of a friend or relative; but it commonly passes away after a little while, and is almost forgotten. We all of us know the

uncertainty of life, we know not what a day may bring forth. We cannot be sure, when we lie down to sleep at night, that we shall rise up in the morning; yet how little are mankind affected by the solemn consideration, though an eternity of happiness or misery depends upon the state in which we die. Death frequently comes as a thief in the night, and finds men unprepared for it. And so likewise *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*, in the same manner as the flood came in the days of Noah. It is needful then that the ministers of Christ should continually sound the alarm, *The end of all things is at hand*; time is passing away, eternity is approaching. Are you prepared for death? Are you prepared for judgment? These may come upon you unexpectedly. Be prepared to meet them; for you must die, and you must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. In the same state and condition as we are found to be at death, we shall appear in the day of judgment; for there is no repentance in the grave. May this solemn truth then produce a permanent impression upon our minds; may it have an abiding effect upon us all the days of our life, "that we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal," or that everlasting blessedness which is reserved for the children of God in His eternal kingdom and glory. The conduct which becomes those who are impressed

with the conviction that *the end of all things is at hand*, is described in the text and the following verses. This is the

Second point to which our attention is to be directed. The apostle exhorts, *Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer*. To be *sober*, is to be of a sound mind. Wherein this sobriety consists, we learn from a similar exhortation of the apostle Paul. *Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation*. This is Christian sobriety; and that which the maturest reflection and thoughtfulness will approve of. It is the opposite of that which is wild and fanatical. It consists in putting ourselves in an attitude of self-defence against our spiritual enemies, and being equipped with that armour which will not only enable us to maintain the conflict with them, but will ensure the victory. The breastplate, or that which defends the heart against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil, is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, and love to Him for having accomplished the work of our redemption. When the heart is protected with this breastplate, it is assaulted in vain by the powers of darkness. By faith in Christ pardon is brought home to the conscience of the penitent sinner, who humbly confesses his transgressions unto the Lord. And love to Him who has had mercy upon us, will

ever accompany the humble hope of forgiveness. And *as we have received mercy we faint not*,⁵⁰ but take courage to persevere in the conflict in which we are engaged. The Christian warrior, having *for a helmet the hope of salvation* through Christ, is emboldened to lift up his head with confidence and joy, and not to fear the power of his spiritual enemies; because he is persuaded, that in the strength of the Lord; *and in the power of His might*, he shall assuredly obtain the victory, and receive *the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul*; so that *he shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end*.⁵¹

But together with this, being sensible of his own weakness and insufficiency, in his own strength, to contend with his unrelenting, violent, and subtil foes, notwithstanding he is provided with the armour of God, he *watches unto prayer; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance*.⁵² Thus he engages Divine aid to protect him, which his adversaries are utterly unable to withstand. He may therefore lift up his head with boldness in the most severe conflict with his spiritual adversary, and say, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear*. For though Satan may *thrust sore at him*, to make him *fall*, *the Lord* will be his *Helper*,⁵³ and will enable him

⁵⁰ 2 Cor. iv. 1. ⁵¹ Isaiah xlv. 17. ⁵² Eph. vi. 18. ⁵³ Ps. cxviii. 6, 13-15.

to rejoice, *The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly: The Lord is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation.*⁵³ Prayer is however to be continued. He is to *continue instant in prayer*. His prayers are also to be multiplied. The word is in the plural number: *Watch unto prayers*. These are to be repeated again and again. As long as we are in this world, which is our enemy's country, we are safe only while we pray for help from God. Unsustained and unprotected by Him, we fall an easy prey to the enemy of our souls. It is only while we *continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*, that we can expect to obtain the victory over him. Those who are of a sound mind will therefore ever *watch unto prayer; in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*, making *known* their requests unto God; that *the peace of God which passeth all understanding* may keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The apostle having given this direction respecting the importance of maintaining intercourse with God, in order to be prepared for *the end of all things*, proceeds to exhort Christians as to the manner in which they are to act towards each other. *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*. Where love to Christ reigns in the heart, love to the brethren, who are children of the same heavenly Father, will be manifested in the conduct. This love is to be *fervent*, not cold

and inactive, but extended as far as possible, and ready to be manifested on all occasions. Christians are to *love as brethren*, to *be pitiful* or full of pity and compassion, to *be courteous*⁵⁴ or kind to each other, to be *of one accord, of one mind*,⁵⁵ having *love without dissimulation*,⁵⁶ *for charity shall cover the multitude of sins*. Some have ignorantly quoted this passage, as if it meant that charity, or alms-giving, will atone for sins against God. The pope and priesthood of Rome have turned this idea to their own advantage with great dexterity; and have long persuaded multitudes to give them their money, in return for which they grant useless and deceptive pardons and indulgences, to the eternal ruin of those who have trusted in them. But that those who imagine that the apostle referred either to alms-giving or to an atonement for sin in this passage are mistaken, will be very plain, if we refer to the place in the Old Testament from which it is quoted. The wise man observes, *Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins*; which is as much as to say, that we do not see the faults of those whom we love, but are ready to excuse their failings, when we do notice them. It is therefore said, on the other hand, *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love*.⁵⁷ Instead of endeavouring to depreciate or defame one another,

⁵⁴ 1 Peter iii. 8. ⁵⁵ Phil. ii. 2. ⁵⁶ Rom. xii. 9. ⁵⁷ Prov. x. 12; xvii. 9.

as is the common practice of the people of the world, Christians should esteem one another highly in love, and be rather desirous of finding out each other's excellencies than their defects. This will make their intercourse pleasant. But this *charity toward each other* must be cemented by the love of Christ, or it will be in danger of degenerating into that which is earthly and sensual. It must be love for Christ's sake, as those who are the members of His mystical body, and not arising from any other considerations. It was this charity which the apostle Paul inculcated, when he besought the Ephesians to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*⁶⁸ What a lovely appearance would the Christian world present, were this charity in general exercise.

Our apostle proceeds, *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.* This was very needful at a time when there were no public places of resort for travellers, in which they could be accommodated. It was particularly desirable when Christian brethren were going about in different parts of the world, for the purpose of making known the glad tidings of the gospel of Christ. St. Paul connects the two subjects here united, in the like manner; *Let brotherly love continue; be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby*

*some have entertained angels unawares.*⁵⁹ St. John commends Gaius for exercising this hospitality. *Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers, which have borne witness of thy charity before the church; whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well; because that for His name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.*⁶⁰ Of the same person St. Paul makes mention in his epistle to the Romans; *Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you.*⁶¹ What an honourable title was this. It denoted his readiness to promote the cause of God to the utmost of his power; to further the good work as opportunity was afforded him, from love to Christ and His people.

In connexion with this subject our apostle proceeds to exhort, *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* By which it is intimated, that whatever grace or gift of any kind has been vouchsafed by God to His people, is for the benefit of the church of Christ, whether it be of temporal good things, or of spiritual gifts; all are to be used by Christians for the good of their brethren. Not that any thing like a community of goods is requisite. I con-

⁵⁸ Eph. iv. 1—3. ⁵⁹ Heb. xiii. 1, 2. ⁶⁰ 3 John 5—8. ⁶¹ Rom. xvi. 23.

ceive it is quite a mistaken idea to imagine that this ever did subsist in the primitive Christian church. The exhortations to liberality to the poor which we find in the New Testament would have been unnecessary, if this had been the case. There was indeed a common stock out of which the actual wants of the poor were daily supplied, and to which those who were able gave liberally; but Christianity never required those who embraced it to be all put on a level in society, but always gave *honour to whom honour was due*, according to the rank and station which they occupied. Those to whom God had given temporal or spiritual blessings, were to dispense them *as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*; or remembering that whatever they possessed, was entrusted to them by God for an important purpose, which should not be lost sight of.

But what the apostle meant most especially by the gifts which were received by members of the church of Christ, he shows in the next verse, where he says, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth*. Here is first the gift of utterance, to make known the gospel for the benefit of others. Those who had this gift, were to employ the means which would enable them to make a right use of it. They were, according to our Saviour's command, to *search the*

scriptures. This is important, indeed, with respect to the ministers of Christ. They ought to be, like Apollos, *mighty in the scriptures*, that they may bring them forward in such a manner as may be required for the edification and admonition and consolation of the children of God, or for the instruction of the ignorant and uninformed. The oracles of God are the standard to which the ministers of Christ are to appeal on all occasions. The church of England declares, in her sixth Article of religion, that "holy scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith; or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." These lively oracles *holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*.⁶² And since *all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*,⁶³ it must be believed in order to the saving of the soul; and they are not to be listened to as ministers of Christ, who take not these oracles of God for the rule of their faith and practice, and teach not according to them.

And while their constant appeal is *to the law and to the testimony*⁶⁴ of God in His holy word, they

⁶² 2 Peter i. 21. ⁶³ 2 Tim. iii. 16. ⁶⁴ Isaiah viii. 20; lv. 11.

are to *minister* according to *the ability which God giveth*; they are to look to Him for supplies of His grace to make the word effectual to accomplish His purposes in the salvation of those who hear it. Unless He give this ability, all labour is in vain. He must work with His servants, and apply His word to the hearts and consciences of those who hear it, or it will not be mighty to pull down the strong holds of sin and Satan in the human heart. His grace alone is sufficient for this. But when His *strength is made perfect in the weakness* of His servants; or when, being sensible of their own weakness and feebleness and inability to carry into effect the purposes of His grace, in employing them to make known the word of God, they wait upon Him for the fulfilment of His promise, that His *word shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleaseth, and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sends it*;⁶⁴ then the end is answered for which the word of God is made known, then sinners are converted from the error of their ways, then edification and instruction are received by those who wait upon God in His house, then Divine grace is manifested to be almighty to accomplish the object for which the ministry is appointed.

While the ministers of Christ pray that this may be the case, it becomes the hearers of the word of God to pray also for the accomplishment

of the same object; that *utterance may be given unto them that preach the word, that they may open their mouths boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel; that therein they may speak boldly as they ought to speak.*⁶⁵ Without this *ability which God giveth*, all is in vain. He must give the increase; and He must be waited upon for it. For this He *will be inquired of by His people, that He may do it for them.*⁶⁶ And when *the Spirit is poured from high*, then *the wilderness will be a fruitful field;*⁶⁷ when there are *showers of blessings* in answer to the *effectual fervent prayer* of the people of God, then *the peaceable fruits of righteousness* will spring up, *the desert* will appear as the garden of the Lord, *the solitary place* will rejoice and blossom as the rose.⁶⁷ May the spirit of grace and of supplications be poured upon us, that we may be importunate with God for His blessing to be vouchsafed in the use of the means of grace, and may receive it in answer to our humble petitions.

The end proposed by the ministry is the next point brought forward by our apostle, *that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ*. Whatever we have, whatever we are, we should seek to glorify God in all. This should be our end and aim in every thing. The glory of God is the end of all His dispensations to the children

⁶⁵ Eph. vi. 19, 20. ⁶⁶ Ezek. xxxvi. 37. ⁶⁷ Isaiah xxxii. 15; xxxv. 1.

of men. He created all things for His glory. For this purpose the universe was brought into existence. But in this our world, it is *through Jesus Christ* that He is to *be glorified in all things*; because of His grace displayed in the redemption and salvation of lost sinners, through His beloved Son. No human being can therefore answer the end of his creation, or glorify God, but as he is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can have no intercourse with God, no fellowship with Him; there is no means of pardon, or of acceptance in His presence, but as our reliance is placed on the Lord Jesus Christ. He must be the Saviour of our souls, or we shall perish everlastingly. It was for the promotion of His own glory that God sent His only begotten Son into our world; and therefore, while it is declared *that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*, it is also said, *he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him*. If our sins be not pardoned through faith in His blood-shedding and death, we shall die in our sins, and be lost for ever. Oh! that these solemn truths of the word of God might gain that attention from every one of us which is due to them; that *God may be glorified* in each of us individually, *through Jesus Christ*.

And having Him for our Saviour, and being sensible that every blessing we receive flows to us through Him, while we recollect the debt of

love and gratitude which we owe to God in Christ, we shall be disposed to give Him the glory which He claims as His due. The church of His redeemed in earth and heaven owns Him as its Lord and King, and will ever use the song of thanksgiving, *To Him be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* All glory and power belong of right to Him, for He is *the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; to whom belong honour and power everlasting. Amen.* To Him will be the praise and glory of the salvation of His redeemed for evermore, when *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.*

Let us submit ourselves to the sceptre of His grace, that He may be glorified in us and by us here on earth, that we may be prepared for that great day of the Lord, which *so cometh as a thief in the night*; and which, while it will fill His enemies with alarm and confusion of face, will bring joy and salvation to His believing people, who shall then glorify and praise Him in His eternal kingdom for evermore. Let us live in expectation of the fulfilment of His promise, as those who *love His appearing*, and are *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

SERMON XXXIV.

FOR

WHIT-SUNDAY.

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Acts ii. 4.

AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST, AND BEGAN TO SPEAK WITH OTHER TONGUES, AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE.

INSTEAD of a portion of scripture selected from the apostolical epistles, our church this day calls the attention of her members to the account contained in the Acts of the Apostles, of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ; whereby they were endued with power from on high, *to testify the gospel of the grace of God*, and to work miracles in confirmation of the truth of their testimony. It pleased God in His wisdom to appoint the most public occasions for the accomplishment of the most

remarkable events relative to the introduction of Christianity into the world, so that it might be truly said, *This thing was not done in a corner*.⁶⁸ Three times in a year all the males of the Jewish nation were commanded to appear before the Lord their God in Jerusalem, as it is mentioned in the first lesson for this morning's service; namely, at the passover; at the feast of weeks, called Pentecost, from its occurring fifty days after the former festival; and at the feast of tabernacles. At the first of these festivals, *Christ our passover* was *sacrificed for us*,⁶⁹ by which means the attention of the whole nation was directed to the subject of His sufferings and death, and His resurrection from the dead. On the next occasion of the nation being assembled together, the circumstance took place which we this day commemorate. This festival was observed as a season of gratitude and joy for the ingathering of the harvest. The apostles had just before witnessed the ascension of their Lord and Master into heaven, previous to which He had *commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said He, ye have heard of Me; for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence;*⁷⁰ *ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall*

⁶⁸ Acts xxvi. 26.⁶⁹ 1 Cor. i. 7.⁷⁰ Acts i. 4, 5, 8.

*be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*⁷⁰ In the course of ten days afterwards, the feast of weeks commenced.

St. Luke relates, in the portion of scripture to which our attention is now to be directed, that *when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place*, no doubt waiting for the fulfilment of the promise of their Lord and Master, as He had directed them. *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire; and it sat upon each of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, or in foreign languages, with which they were not before acquainted, as the Spirit gave them utterance.* Thus they were qualified at once to execute the commission which had been given them to *go and teach all nations*; which could not otherwise have been accomplished by illiterate Galileans, such as they were. The festival season afforded them an opportunity of ascertaining that they were really made acquainted with many living languages; for *there were dwelling at Jerusalem, during that period, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.* These persons would not have been at Jerusalem but for the feast. When it was commonly reported that the disciples of

Christ were speaking in an unintelligible manner, or in a number of unknown languages, the foreigners were induced to go to them, and were astonished to find that in whatever language they addressed the apostles, in that very tongue the wonderful works of God were immediately proclaimed. *Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together and were confounded, or filled with astonishment, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we, every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphilia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians; we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.* The people of Jerusalem and Judea, who were not acquainted with these foreign languages, when they heard the apostles of Christ speak words which they did not understand, began to mock, and said, *These men are full of new wine;* they supposed them to be drunken. The apostle Peter, hearing this, stood up, and addressed them with such effect in setting forth the glory of the risen and exalted Saviour, that *the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls,*

who repented, and were *baptized every one of them in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost*. Such was the wonderful effect immediately produced by the effusion of the Holy Spirit, which we this day commemorate. Let us now inquire, from the words of the text,

First, How the apostles of Christ *were filled with the Holy Ghost*; and,

Secondly, In what respect believers in Christ, in all ages of the Christian church, are made partakers of this most excellent gift.

Let it be our prayer that the Spirit of God may be pleased to bear His witness in our hearts, that we may be taught by Him the truth as it is in Jesus, and may partake of the comforting and sanctifying influences of His grace, that He may be glorified in us and by us. We are to inquire,

First, How, or in what respect, the apostles of Christ *were filled with the Holy Ghost*. As it regarded themselves, personally considered, the meaning of this expression is beautifully paraphrased in the Collect for this day, in which it is said, that “God did teach the hearts of His faithful people, by sending to them the light of His Holy Spirit.” By the gracious operations of the Holy Ghost, *the eyes of their understanding were enlightened*; they were led into all the truth of the gospel of Christ; and their hearts were so affected by it, that they received the truth in the

love of it. It was for this purpose that our blessed Lord promised that the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, should be sent to them. But it was not merely for their own benefit, as individuals, that Divine knowledge was communicated to them. It was given them in a large and abundant measure, for the benefit of mankind, that *their sound might go out into all lands, their words unto the ends of the world.*⁷¹ In consequence of this *they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*⁷² For the benefit of mankind then the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ *were filled with the Holy Ghost*, and made partakers of His plenary inspiration. They spake, as the text states, *as the Spirit gave them utterance*, or in other words, *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. This had been promised to them by their Lord and Master. He had said to them, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist. The Holy Ghost shall teach you what ye ought to say.*⁷³ It was under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit that they promulgated the doctrines of Christianity. What they said was suggested to them by the Holy Ghost, so that they said nothing wrong, they made no mistake in the doctrine which they taught. And in order that what was

⁷¹ Psalm xix. 4. ⁷² Mark xvi. 20. ⁷³ Luke xxi. 15; xii. 12.

according to the mind and will of God might be known to future ages, they were directed by the same inspiration to commit to writing *the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to their trust*.⁷⁴ How important then must the epistles of the holy apostles of our Lord and Saviour be. As the last revelation of the will of God to man, they are to be regarded as the key to the whole volume of inspiration, by means of which the other parts of it are opened and elucidated, and are consequently to be explained.

In order, however, to have a right understanding of Divine truth, it is needful for us to pray as the Psalmist did, *Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law*.⁷⁵ It is said of our blessed Saviour, that when He appeared to His disciples after His resurrection from the dead, *He opened their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures*.⁷⁶ The apostle Paul prayed for the Christians at Ephesus, *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened*.⁷⁷ Without a spiritual discernment communicated by the influence of the Holy Ghost, a right apprehension of Divine truth cannot be obtained; the heart will be unaffected, and the soul uninfluenced, notwithstanding

⁷⁴ 1 Tim. i. 11. ⁷⁵ Ps. cxix. 18. ⁷⁶ Luke xxiv. 45. ⁷⁷ Eph. i. 17, 18.

ing the judgment may be informed, so as to *approve the things that are excellent*.⁷⁸ We must therefore earnestly implore this blessing from our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, if we would partake of it. We must pray that *the Spirit of truth may guide us into all truth*; that we may *know the truth, and the truth may set us free*⁷⁹ from the dominion of sin and Satan; and that living under the blessed influence of the Holy Ghost, we *may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*.⁸⁰

But the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ also *spoke with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*. This is the proof given in the text of their being *filled with the Holy Ghost*. It was of great importance that the gift of tongues should be communicated to them. Their being able to speak in a variety of languages, which they had never had any opportunity of learning, was a remarkable *sign for them that believed not*,⁸¹ of their Divine commission to preach the gospel of Christ. This gift was not bestowed on the apostles only, but on others also. It continued for some time to be vouchsafed as occasion required, as we learn from the apostolical epistles. The fourteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians contains a remarkable statement on this subject. Without the gift of tongues it would have been impossible for the apostles to *go into*

⁷⁸ Phil. i. 10. ⁷⁹ John xvi. 13; viii. 32. ⁸⁰ Titus ii. 10. ⁸¹ 1 Cor. xiv. 22.

all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. But hereby they were enabled, wherever they went, to speak to all men in their *own tongue*, wherein they were born, the wonderful works of God. Of their knowledge of foreign languages, we have proof still remaining in the writings of St. Peter and St. John; who were originally unlearned Galileans, unacquainted, before the day of Pentecost, with any other beside their own native language. After Christianity had once been spread throughout the world, there was not that occasion for this gift, which had previously existed, and it was therefore discontinued.

The great end for which the gift of tongues was bestowed, is mentioned in the proper preface for this day to the doxology in our Communion Service, "The Holy Ghost came down from heaven with a sudden great sound, as it had been a mighty wind, in the likeness of fiery tongues, lighting upon the apostles, to teach them, and to lead them into all truth; giving them both the gift of divers languages, and also boldness, with fervent zeal constantly to preach the gospel unto all nations; whereby we have been brought out of darkness and error, into the clear light and true knowledge of Jesus Christ." What reason have we to bless God, that by means of the gift of tongues the knowledge of the gospel of Christ was communicated to all nations. For to this gift we may trace its being

imparted to our own country, which had previously been covered with the grossest darkness of ignorance and error. And to the translation of the word of God into our own language, we may ascribe all the civil and religious privileges which, as a nation, we have long enjoyed. May we bring forth the fruit of it, to the glory of God. May the light of Divine revelation never be extinguished in our land by Popish superstition, or infidel indifference.

A further proof of the apostles being *filled with the Holy Ghost*, was, their being endued with miraculous powers, or the gifts of healing. These our blessed Lord had declared to them they should be enabled to perform. *These signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.* Thus they were enabled to benefit the bodies as well as the souls of men, in order to prove what a blessed religion that was which they were endeavouring to diffuse; and how superior He, whose name they made known as the Saviour of the world, was to the powers of darkness. For while demoniacal agency was inflicting every kind of injury upon men, like the magicians of Egypt, who could increase the calamities of their country, but could not do any thing towards the

removal of them ; it was shown that Christianity is able to confer the most valuable benefits on all who come within the reach of its compassionate influence. And as these miraculous powers were a full proof of the Divine origin of Christianity, it pleased God to continue them in the church of Christ for a considerable period, even as long as pagan idolatry was the established religion of the Roman empire. But when Christianity had obtained the ascendancy, they ceased ; as the knowledge of Christian doctrine might then be promulgated by ordinary means, and the evidence of its Divine origin had been fully manifested.

In what has been said respecting the apostles of Christ being filled with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, we have seen that *they* were partakers of both His ordinary and His extraordinary operations. The former were for the benefit of their own souls. The latter for the benefit of others ; that Christianity might, by their means, be disseminated throughout the world at large, and sinners might be saved by the belief of the truth as it is in Jesus. We are to consider,

Secondly, In what respect believers in Christ, in all ages of the church, are partakers of the gift of the Holy Ghost. They no longer partake of plenary inspiration, of the gift of tongues, or of miraculous powers ; but they partake of the

same blessings as the apostles of Christ enjoyed for the benefit of their own souls. These may be comprised briefly in two particulars. They are *born of the Spirit*, and are *led by the Spirit*. With the doctrine of the new birth, our Saviour may be said to have begun His ministry. How He enforced it, may be seen in His conversation with Nicodemus. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again,—of water and of the Spirit,—he cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God. For that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that only which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Hence He adds, Ye must be born again.*⁸² The reason why this new birth is absolutely necessary is, because, as the apostle declares, *The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*⁸³ All mankind are *by nature the children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins*,⁸⁴ and must therefore be quickened to newness of life, and born again, in order to be *delivered from the wrath to come*. This is the work of the Spirit of God. No man can quicken his own soul. *It is the Spirit that quickeneth.*⁸² He is the Author of spiritual regeneration. This new birth is manifested by faith in Christ. *As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become*

⁸² John iii. 3, 5—7; vi. 63. ⁸³ Rom. viii. 14, 7. ⁸⁴ Eph. ii. 3, 1.

*the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*⁸⁵ And therefore it is also said, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.*⁸⁶ He is born of water; that is, he is not only baptized into the faith of Christ, but he is *purged from his old sins.*⁸⁷ This new birth is ascribed to the word of God, as well as to the Spirit of God, because it is by the belief of the truth of the gospel applied to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the great change here spoken of is carried into effect. St. Peter says to believers in Christ, *Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.*⁸⁸ We must learn the truth from the word of God, by which the gospel is made known to us, and must pray for the Divine influence of the Spirit of God to apply it to our hearts, that we may believe and obey it. In this respect the teaching of the Spirit of God is as needful now as it was in the days of the apostles. It was in consequence of the gift of the Holy Ghost being received by them that heard the word, that their minds were enlightened, and their hearts were affected by it. For this *inspiration of the Holy Spirit*, we are taught to pray in

⁸⁵ John i. 12, 13. ⁸⁶ 2 Cor. v. 17. ⁸⁷ 2 Peter i. 9. ⁸⁸ 1 Peter i. 22, 23.

our Communion Service, to "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, that we may perfectly love God, and worthily or duly magnify His holy name." Those who are thus influenced by the Holy Ghost, are said to be *born of the Spirit*, because they become the children of God through His gracious operation in their hearts; and they are said to be *born again by the word of God*, because it is by means of that word, which is the testimony of the Spirit, being impressed upon their hearts by His powerful influence, that they are conformed to the image of God. Let us then ask ourselves, Are we partakers of this new birth, which is called in our Catechism, "A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness?" Have we been baptized, not with water only, but with the Holy Ghost? Have we not only been dedicated to God in our infancy, but have the truths of the word of God been brought home to our consciences by the demonstration of the Spirit, so as to produce a change in our spirit and conduct, which is manifested by seeking our happiness, not in the things of time and sense, but in those of God and heaven?

Such is the evidence given by believers in Christ, that they are indeed born of God. The apostle therefore says, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*. Not only is a new principle communicated, but it is also brought into action. Those who are born

of the Spirit are *led by the Spirit*. By the influence of the Spirit of God they are enabled to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*⁸⁹ Are we thus *led by the Spirit of God*? Are we living under His Divine influence and guidance? Is our walk and conduct governed by the word of God? Do we take it for our directory, *a lamp to our feet and a light to our path*?⁹⁰ Do we resist Satan, strive against sin, and overcome the world, in the strength of the Lord, and in the power of His might, denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Christ; and living in hope of eternal life, having *the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us*?⁹¹ Not only must our minds be enlightened, and our judgments informed, but our hearts must be sanctified, and drawn out in love to God, to *love Him because He first loved us*,⁹² and our lives must be devoted to His service, if we are *led by the Spirit of God*. The Spirit of God leads His people to Christ as the only hope of salvation for their souls. He is the Glorifier of the Lord Jesus

⁸⁹ Titus ii. 12—14. ⁹⁰ Ps. cxix. 105. ⁹¹ Rom. v. 5. ⁹² 1 John iv. 19.

Christ. He exhibits the suitableness of Christ to our condition, and our need of Him. But *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*,⁹³ and therefore he shall not enjoy the blessings which are promised to the children of God. Let it be our prayer that the gift of the Holy Ghost may be vouchsafed to us, that by His grace we may have a right judgment in those things which belong to our everlasting peace, and may embrace with our whole hearts the great salvation of the Son of God, and devote ourselves to His service and glory. And may we evermore rejoice in His holy comfort. May *He comfort our hearts*⁹⁴ with the assurance of pardoning mercy being bestowed upon us, and of our reconciliation with God, through the redemption of Christ; and may we, by His grace, be strengthened and refreshed in our souls while we commemorate the dying love of our blessed Redeemer, our risen and exalted Saviour, as He has commanded us to do, that we may look forward with a good hope beyond this perishing world, to that glorious abode of the blessed, *whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus*,⁹⁵ as the High Priest over the house of God, from whence He will come to receive to Himself, in His eternal and glorious kingdom, those who have believed through grace, to be ever with the Lord.

⁹³ Rom. viii. 9. ⁹⁴ 2 Thess. ii. 17. ⁹⁵ Heb. vi. 20.

SERMON XXXV.

FOR

TRINITY SUNDAY.

THE WORSHIP OF HEAVEN.

Revelation iv. 8.

AND THEY REST NOT DAY AND NIGHT, SAY-
ING, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD AL-
MIGHTY, WHICH WAS, AND IS, AND IS TO
COME.

THE portion of scripture which is appointed to be read instead of the Epistle for this day, contains one of the most sublime and majestic descriptions of the worship of heaven that is to be found in the volume of Divine revelation. The beloved disciple appears to have been admitted to see, *in the Spirit*, his Divine Redeemer seated upon the throne of His glory, and receiving the adoration of the heavenly hosts. *No man hath seen God at any time.* The exhibition, therefore, of the man upon the throne was that of the glorified Redeemer,

who is the image of the invisible God. His splendour had before so overpowered the apostle, that he *fell at His feet as one dead.* But although the brightness of His glory was so overwhelming, His disciple found Him to be the same gracious, kind, and compassionate Being that He had always manifested Himself to be in the days of His flesh; for *He laid His right hand upon him, saying unto him, Fear not;* and then having commissioned him to write to the angels, the ministers or bishops, of the Asiatic churches, the admonitions which He dictated; a further exhibition of the glory of his Lord and Master was vouchsafed to the apostle, by which he was assured that He was indeed *the King of kings and Lord of lords.*

St. John records, *After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne; and He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.* Here it appears that the Lord Jesus was seen sitting on the throne of heaven, resplendent with majesty and glory; and encircled with a rainbow, beautiful and transparent as an emerald, a token of the everlasting covenant between God, and every

living creature of all flesh ; or of the covenant of redemption, of which our Lord Jesus Christ undertook to be the Mediator and Surety. This covenant, it is here intimated, is firm and unchangeable as the throne of God, which the rainbow encircled. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats ; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment ; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. These are supposed to denote the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles, as representatives of the Jewish and Gentile churches, or of the Mosaical and Christian dispensations. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices ; and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. This describes the fulness of the Spirit by which the church of God is enlightened and comforted. And before the throne there was a sea of glass, like unto crystal ; descriptive of the purity of the church, as washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. These living creatures, called by the prophet Isaiah, Seraphim, and by the prophet Ezekiel, Cherubim, occupied the throne. Representations of them were made in the holy of holies, both in the tabernacle, and in the temple at Jerusalem. These living creatures,

whose overshadowing wings denote the protection which they afforded, and their being full of eyes, their omnipresence and omniscience, are further described. *The first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle; and the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within.* The lion is the monarch of the forest, the ox of the plain, and the eagle of the air; and thus are emblems of sovereign power and majesty. With respect to their occupation it is said, *They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* This is the song of heaven, where the holiness of the Divine Being is eminently displayed. The meaning of the song is further explained. *Those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever.* And this acclamation of praise was a signal for the worship of heaven being paid to Him; for then *the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.*

He then who sat upon the throne, who had before described Himself to His apostle, *I am*

*the first and the last ; I am He that liveth and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death ;*⁹⁶ was the acknowledged Creator and Governor of the universe ; to whom *every knee must bow, and every tongue confess* His almighty power, His infinite or incomprehensible majesty, and His eternal glory.

If we compare this account with what is elsewhere spoken of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall see that it was to Him, exalted in His glorified body, that this worship was offered. St. Peter says of Him, that *He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*⁹⁷ St. Paul declares, *By Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him.*⁹⁸ Thus it was that *God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord in the glory of God the Father.*⁹⁹ These texts confirm the statement, that it was our glorified Redeemer, in whom *dwelleth all the fulness*

⁹⁶ Rev. i. 18. ⁹⁷ 1 Peter iii. 22. ⁹⁸ Col. i. 16. ⁹⁹ Phil. ii. 9—11.

of the Godhead bodily, who was on the throne, and received the worship of heaven, as it is here represented. The attributes ascribed to Him in the text are holiness, almighty power, and eternity. These attributes, combined, are peculiar to the Divine Being; *His name is holy; He is the almighty God; He only is from everlasting to everlasting.* These are the peculiar attributes of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; the three ever-blessed Persons in one Jehovah.

The same language as that in the text is used in the vision with which the prophet Isaiah was favoured. He says, *In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims, each one had six wings, with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*¹ This is the feeling which a view of the transcendent holiness and glory of the Divine Being will ever excite in the minds of the children of God. They will be abased before Him under a sense of their utter

unworthiness to appear in His presence, who is infinitely holy. In reference to the Person to whom the vision of Isaiah related, the Evangelist St. John informs us, *These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, the glory of Jesus, and spake of Him.*² The prophet mentions further, *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me. And He said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*¹ On which St. Paul observes, *Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear and not understand,*³ and so on.

* And Jk: he

The glory of the Triune Jehovah is then that which was displayed both to the enraptured prophet, and to the beloved disciple; and for this reason the threefold repetition is made, *Holy, holy, holy*; since “the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.” With what reverence and awe does it become the creatures of His power to contemplate His infinite perfections! The holiness of God is the

¹ Isaiah vi. 1—5, 8—10. ² John xii. 41. ³ Acts xxviii. 25, 26.

First of His attributes mentioned in the text. His holiness denotes His inconceivable purity, and entire separation from all evil, so that it is said, *Yea, the heavens are not clean in His sight*, in comparison with Himself. The infinite holiness of the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of heaven, is enough to fill us sinful creatures with the greatest dread of Him. The proclamation of it causes the most profound adoration, and the highest songs of praise in His sacred presence. The heavenly hosts worship their Creator and their King, cast their crowns before Him, and chant His praises, as being alone worthy of the highest honour from all created intelligences. With what humility ought we to contemplate it, when we fall so far short of it. So much so, that it is said, *What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, He putteth no trust in His saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in His sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water.*⁴

The consideration of the holiness and majesty of God, naturally leads to the inquiry, *How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?* How can a sinful creature be accepted with Him? For, *behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight; how much less man that*

is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm? How then should man be just with God? since, if He will contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand. We must confess, as Job did, If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. But such is the pride of man, that we are naturally prone to justify ourselves rather than God. As long as this spirit is indulged, we are evidently ignorant both of ourselves and of God. When Job was made acquainted with himself, and with the holiness of God, he humbly said to the Lord, I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth; once have I spoken; but I will not answer; yea, twice; but I will proceed no further⁴ in self-justification.

The method of God's dealing with mankind is, *He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom.⁴ The broken and contrite heart He will not despise; but*

⁴ Job xv. 14; xxv. 4; ix. 2, 20; xlii. 5; xl. 4; xxxiii. 27.

on the contrary, the prophet Isaiah represents Jehovah as speaking, *Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*⁵ While the proud He beholdeth afar off,⁶ He graciously declares, *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*⁵ Hence the first work of the Spirit of God, when He comes to mankind, is to *reprove the world of sin,*⁷ or to produce conviction in the consciences of those who have transgressed the laws of God, that they are verily guilty before Him, in order that they may be led to believe in Him who is the Saviour of sinners, to *behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,*⁷ to put their trust in His infinitely perfect righteousness, who is gone into heaven to plead it before the throne of God on behalf of His believing people; and to live as becometh those who are delivered from condemnation, as well as from the dominion of Satan and sin, and are looking forward to the judgment to come with a good hope, through grace, that they shall not be ashamed before the Judge of all the earth at His coming.

The consideration of the infinite holiness of the

⁵ Isaiah lvii. 15; lxvi. 2. ⁶ Psalm cxxxviii. 6. ⁷ John xvi. 8; i. 29.

Lord God Almighty, should lead us to humble ourselves at His footstool, confessing our sinfulness in His presence, and imploring His pardoning mercy and grace through Christ our Redeemer. *For if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; because we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins, and whose blood cleanseth us from all sin.*⁸ It is thus only that we can meet with acceptance in the presence of Him who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.*⁹

The holiness of God is not revealed in order to fill us with terror or dread; but to lead us to seek for acceptance with Him, and conformity to Him. His holiness denotes, however, not only His infinite purity, but what must be intimately connected with it, His *goodness, righteousness, and truth*, or His being infinitely good and gracious; and also that *a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He.*¹⁰ One who is infinitely good and upright, must be diametrically opposed to every thing that is sinful. Evil cannot dwell with Him. He delights in nothing but goodness. The Psalmist makes mention of the holiness of God as a reason for continuing to seek His help in the time of distress. *O my God, I*

⁸ 1 John i. 9, 7; ii. 1, 2. ⁹ Hab. i. 13. ¹⁰ Deut. xxxii. 4.

*cry in the day time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, I am not silent. But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto Thee, and were delivered; they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded.*¹¹ Here it appears that the holiness of God was the ground of His confidence, that it would not be a vain thing for him to *continue instant in prayer*, notwithstanding there appeared to be a delay on the part of God to *give him help from trouble*. He who only is holy, is also alone good. *There is none good but one, that is, God.*¹² And as holiness and goodness are His characteristics, if we would be like Him, we must delight in them also. *The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.*¹³ These He enables His children to bring forth in their life and conduct, to His glory and praise.

The consideration of the infinite holiness of God should produce the same effect upon us as the proclamation of it does in His more immediate presence. With our whole hearts we should worship and adore Him in the deepest self-abasement, who alone is worthy to receive eternal *blessing and honour and glory and power.*¹⁴ It was His infinite holiness which led the Father of heaven to provide for the redemption of fallen

¹¹ Psalm xxii. 2—5. ¹² Matt. xix. 17. ¹³ Eph. v. 9. ¹⁴ Rev. v. 13.

man; since without satisfaction being made to His justice, no transgressor of His law could possibly be admitted into His blissful and glorious presence. He therefore provided the means whereby *mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embraced each other*;¹⁵ whereby God could be *just, and the Justifier of the ungodly*,¹⁶ through faith in the redemption of His beloved Son; and the unrighteous and unholy might be *washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*.¹⁷ Let us contemplate this Divine attribute with gratitude and praise, while we seek earnestly to be numbered among those of whom it is said, *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, but imputeth righteousness without works*, or independently of his own merits or deservings; *and in whose spirit there is no guile*.¹⁵ May we, as those who are *reconciled to God by the death of His Son*, live and walk day by day in this world as in His presence, *as seeing Him who is invisible*, and hereafter be admitted to see Him as He is, and be made like Him in His eternal kingdom and glory. The text makes mention,

Secondly, Of the almighty power of this most holy One; while the proclamation is made,

¹⁵Ps. lxxxv. 10; xxxii. 1, 2. ¹⁶Rom. iii. 26; iv. 5; v. 10. ¹⁷1 Cor. vi. 11.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Here we see that almighty power is ascribed in heaven to the Triune Jehovah, as well as infinite holiness. He is the *Lord God Almighty*. His almighty power is peculiarly displayed in the works of creation. *Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created.* As His eternal power and Godhead are manifested by the things that are made, which are all the works of His hands, they who do not glorify God their Creator, are without excuse.¹⁸ So the apostle Paul argues. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handy work;*¹⁹ but how few of the sinful children of men are led "from nature up to nature's God!" How few, in consequence of the wonders of creation with which they are surrounded, look beyond things visible and temporal, to Him of whose glory the whole earth is full. We find the Psalmist saying, *When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that Thou visitest him.*¹⁹ The workmanship Divine, which he beheld all around him, filled him with a sense of his own nothingness, and with gratitude for the goodness of God to His creatures. Such ought to be the effect produced upon our minds

¹⁸ Romans i. 20.¹⁹ Psalm xix. 1; viii. 3, 4.

whenever we contemplate the works of creation. They should lead us, on the one hand, to the most exalted ideas of the Divine power and glory; and on the other, to the utmost self-abasement before Him on account of our own insignificance and unworthiness, and the most fervent gratitude for His goodness to us, His undeserving creatures. But it is important to observe, that as He who is infinitely holy hateth all sin, His almighty power is engaged to punish the transgressors of His holy law; and as He loveth righteousness, He is engaged to protect them that trust in Him from the power of all His and their enemies; and therefore *no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against them in judgment, shall be condemned.*²⁰ It may therefore be said, *Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*²¹

Thirdly, Eternity is also ascribed to the Lord God Almighty in the text. He *was, and is, and is to come*. This is an explanation of the word Jehovah; and it shows that there never was a time or period in which He did not exist. *He was* before all things. He brought the universe into existence. He *was from everlasting*. How is the mind of man lost in the contemplation of a Being who was without beginning. *He is* the

²⁰ Isaiah liv. 17.

²¹ Psalm cxliv. 15.

Proprietor of the world which He made; to Him it of right belongs. He is its Governor, to whom every creature owes the most devoted obedience during every moment of its existence; since it is His bounty which supplies all our wants, which *giveth us all things richly to enjoy*.²² His benefits conferred upon us demand our gratitude and submission to His authority, in whom *we live and move and have our being*.²³ *He is to come*. He lives for evermore; having *the power of an endless life*.²⁴ "Eternal ages saw Him shine, He shines eternal ages hence." Such is our Lord Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*.²⁴ Of none besides the infinitely *holy Lord God Almighty*, is it true, that *He was and is, and is to come, from everlasting to everlasting*. *We are but of yesterday*, the creatures of His power. We are indebted to Him for every comfort we possess, or are capable of enjoying, *seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things*.²³ He was our Creator. He is our Governor. He will be our Judge. Great are our obligations to Him, and solemn is the account that we must render before Him. Let us seek His grace earnestly and diligently, to prepare us to meet Him at His second coming, that then we may be found of Him in peace, and may partake of His great and everlasting salvation.

²² 1 Tim. vi. 17. ²³ Acts xvii. 28, 25. ²⁴ Heb. vii. 16; xiii. 8.

SERMON XXXVI.

FOR THE

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

LOVE TO GOD AND MAN.

1 John iv. 21.

AND THIS COMMANDMENT HAVE WE FROM
HIM, THAT HE WHO LOVETH GOD LOVE
HIS BROTHER ALSO.

THE Epistle for this day contains the great and leading truths of the gospel of Christ, which are brought forward to illustrate and enforce the duty of brotherly love among the children of God. As it contains so many interesting topics connected with this subject, let us enter upon it at once, praying that God the Holy Ghost would be pleased to apply to our hearts and consciences the Divine truths here recorded for our consideration, that the end proposed by them may be answered with respect to us.

The apostle commences with addressing those who are Christians indeed, *Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* What encouraging and persuasive language is this! The subject here introduced, is one on which St. John greatly delights to dwell. He had said before: *This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* And again, *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*²⁵ Love is the great characteristic of the religion of Christ. St. Paul describes the manner in which it operates, when he exhorts Christians, *In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.*²⁶ This is the spirit which Christianity inculcates. Love to God arises from a sense of our obligations to His infinite goodness, and therefore *love is of God.* But in addition to this it is said, *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.*²⁷ It proceeds from the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. And therefore *every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* When God is loved, and the children of God are also loved for His sake, this love is a sure mark of our being made acquainted with Him, and being approved of by Him. And on the other hand, *he that loveth not,*

²⁵ 1 John iii. 11, 14. ²⁶ Phil. ii. 3. ²⁷ Rom. v. 5. ²⁸ Gal. iv. 9.

knoweth not God. He that does not love God, cannot be a child of God, cannot know Him as his Father and his Friend, cannot hold intercourse with Him, cannot enjoy communion and fellowship with Him; for intercourse with God must produce similarity or conformity to Him. Those who truly know God, *or rather*, as St. Paul remarks, *are known of God*,²⁸ cannot but love Him; *for God is love.* He is in Himself so infinitely lovely and loving, that those who behold His Divine perfections, cannot but in a measure reflect the loveliness which is presented to their view.

The apostle proceeds to prove his assertion that *God is love*, by stating that *in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.* This statement he had learned from the lips of our Saviour Himself, who, in His conversation with Nicodemus, the Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, had said, *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* It was indeed a proof that *God is love*, that He extended His compassion to His rebellious creatures, who were perishing in their transgressions. And a still further proof of it is, that since it was impossible to pardon sin without satisfaction being made to Divine justice, He sent *His only begotten Son* into the

world to obey and to suffer all that was needful for this purpose, in order to save us sinners from perishing, and *that we might live through Him*. What love to man did this manifest! A stronger proof of it could not possibly be given. With what gratitude of heart should we sinners contemplate this *love of God toward us*, since the unspeakable blessing of eternal life is bestowed in consequence of it; for through Christ that life which we had forfeited by sin is restored to us; that life which is a deliverance from misery inconceivable, and an entrance upon happiness inexpressible. The *only begotten Son* of God was sent from heaven to take upon Himself our nature, that He might restore to us this forfeited blessing; that through Him we might be made *the children of God*, instead of being *the children of wrath*; that we might be *quickened* from a death *in trespasses and sins*, and might partake of spiritual life, or the enjoyment of the life of God in our souls, and communion and fellowship with Him here on earth, as the pledge and foretaste of eternal life hereafter.

On this subject, the love of God to man, the apostle delights to dwell. He proceeds to observe, *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*. Here we learn the specific purpose for which our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world; and that is, *to be the pro-*

*pitiation for our sins, or to make an atonement for sin. On this account it is said, that Christ suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; that He His ownself bare our sins in His own body on the tree; that by His stripes we were healed.*²⁹ What love to man was that which led the Father of heaven to give up His beloved Son to suffer, bleed, and die, for our salvation! What love was it which led the eternal Son of God to become the Redeemer of lost sinners! It was not caused by the discovery of any disposition in fallen man to return to God and to love Him; for it is said, *When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*³⁰ It was entirely the kindness and love of His own mind, and not any good thing seen in man, that led the Father of heaven to give *His only begotten Son* to be our Redeemer and Saviour. It was love perfectly voluntary and disinterested on His part. *In His love and in His pity He redeemed us.* And this did not arise from any desire on the part of His rebellious and ruined creatures to return to Him; for on the contrary, *All we like sheep had gone astray, we had turned every one to his own way,*³¹ and were

²⁹ 1 Pet. iii. 18; ii. 24. ³⁰ Rom. v. 6, 8, 10. ³¹ Isa. liii. 6. ³² Job xxi. 14.

seeking happiness in the ways of sin and death, in things *earthly, sensual, and devilish*; saying *unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.*³² What love was it then to rescue such creatures from destruction! How ought we to love Him who so greatly loved us! and if we know any thing of His love to our souls, we should imitate His love in our conduct towards our fellow-creatures.

This the apostle presses upon our consideration. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* Those who are truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, are all of them equally partakers of the love and mercy and compassion of their heavenly Father, and therefore they ought to manifest their gratitude for it by showing the same disposition to all around them; and thus be followers or *imitators of Him as His dear or beloved children.* This indeed is the only way in which we can prove our gratitude for His love to us; for, as the Psalmist observes, *our goodness extendeth not to Him, but to the saints that are in the earth.* If then our hearts are impressed with a sense of His loving-kindness toward us, we shall love His children who have received the same benefits from Him as ourselves. And this He influences His people, by His grace, to do. Therefore it is said, *if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.* Love to the brethren is a

proof that we are under Divine influence, and that the love of God has produced in us the effect which it ought to have.

But in order that He may have the glory of His own work ; and that it may not be imagined that the effect produced by the love of God is derived from the will of man, the source of all good is further stated : *Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.* Where God dwells, His Spirit influences the hearts and minds of His people to conformity to His word and will ; and one evidence of His dwelling in us is, that *we dwell in Him*, or that the desires of our souls are towards Him, and the affections of our hearts are set upon Him. *We seek those things that are above ; and set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth ; so that our fellowship is truly with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* And therefore in consequence of partaking of His gracious influences, as the apostle observes, *We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.* This can only be seen and known by any, through an experimental acquaintance with the benefits derived from the salvation of Christ, by faith, or through believing in His name. Those who have seen and known the blessedness of communion with God, and the consolation enjoyed by means of reconciliation with Him, will be desirous of

testifying to all around them their happiness, in order that others may seek to partake of the same enjoyment. The Spirit of God testifies in His holy word and to the hearts of His believing people, that it was the paternal love of God the Father, *the Father of mercies*, which led Him to send His Son into our world; and that Jesus Christ came into the world to be the Saviour of sinners, *that the world through Him might be saved*.³³ Those who by His grace are enabled to receive His testimony, and to put their trust in the salvation of Christ, are to testify or bear witness of it to others. They are to tell of His salvation, and to invite those who hear them to pray earnestly that its blessings may be communicated to their souls, by which alone they can be made truly happy. Christians may be witnesses for God in private, as well as in public situations. And it becomes every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to show to all around him that he is sensible of his obligations to the Father of mercies, for the blessings of His salvation having been made known to him. The testimony here spoken of is the testimony of the gospel, which is to be borne witness of every where, and which all mankind are called upon to believe, in order that they may be saved. As the Son of God came upon earth *to be the Saviour of the world*, it follows of course, that there is no other way of salvation than through Him, or by believing in His

name. This was indeed expressly declared by the apostles of Christ. They proclaimed, *Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*³⁴ All who are influenced by the Spirit of God put their trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the salvation of their souls. They believe the *faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*³⁵ They rejoice that unto them *the word of this salvation* has been *sent*;³⁴ and they pray earnestly for an interest in it. They look up to the God of heaven as their reconciled Father, through the merits and mediation of His beloved Son, their Redeemer; and they seek grace to be enabled to live as the children of God, in obedience to His holy will and commandments day by day. And being taught by the Spirit, they are not ashamed openly to confess that their only hope of salvation is in Jesus Christ; or in other words, that He is the Son of God, who came down from heaven to be the Saviour of mankind.

It is said of those who make this confession, *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* To confess is to believe and avow. It is *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the*

³³ John iii. 17. ³⁴ Acts iv. 12; xiii. 26. ³⁵ 1 Tim. i. 15. ³⁶ Rom. x. 10.

*mouth confession is made unto salvation.*³⁶ In the early ages of Christianity, this confession was not made without cost. It exposed the person who made it to danger, to persecution, to death. And therefore there was no temptation for any to make it, who did not with the heart believe it to be the truth of God. This confession therefore, under such circumstances, was a mark of the indwelling and influence of the Spirit of God over the persons who made it. It was an open avowal of attachment to Christ and His cause, a renouncing of every other hope, and a reliance on the cross of Christ as the only ground of confidence for pardon and reconciliation with God and eternal life. In the hearts of those who thus avowed Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of their souls, the God of heaven had, it was evident, taken up His abode; they were made the *habitation of God through the Spirit*; and they enjoyed communion and fellowship with Him in the spirit of their minds. And in consequence of the intercourse which they maintained with the Lord their God, they could say, *We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.* They were persuaded that the gift of Christ to be the Saviour of mankind, proceeded from the love of God to man. When we consider this, it ought to excite our love to Him in return. Let us meditate upon His wonderful love, that we may be led to love Him above all things.

The apostle repeats the sentiment which He had before expressed, *God is love*; and he adds, *He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him*. Whenever we contemplate God in Christ, we are to regard Him as the God of love. And if the *great love wherewith He hath loved us* impress our hearts as it ought to do, we may be assured that our love to Him proceeds from His grace vouchsafed to our souls. If we love Him, we shall seek for communion with Him in the spirit of our minds; and when we seek it earnestly, He will graciously manifest His presence to us, as He does not unto the world. The Spirit of God raises the hearts and affections of the children of God to Divine and heavenly things, so that *the desires of their souls are to His name, and to the remembrance of Him*. And this is an evidence of His sacred influence being vouchsafed to them, or that He dwelleth in them.

By this mutual intercourse of the children of God and their heavenly Father, their love to Him is promoted, and carried on to maturity; as the apostle observes, *Herein is our love made perfect*; that is, the effect of it is manifested. And He who thus loves God is enabled to behold the Judge of all the earth, not as the Avenger of sin, but as his Friend and his Saviour, who, when He shall come to *judge the world in righteousness*,³⁷ will own and bless His believing people.

It is thus alone *that we can have boldness in the day of judgment.* None but those in whose hearts *the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them,* will be able to stand in the judgment. All others will be ashamed before Him at His coming.³⁷ But those who are without blame before Him in love,³⁸ will then be blessed by Him, *because as He is, so are they in this world.* It is by conformity to the image of God, that evidence is given of being His children.

The reason why those who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ will have confidence in the great and terrible day of the Lord is this, that *there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.* As they love the Lord Jesus Christ, they are enabled to regard their Judge as their Friend and their Saviour; and therefore His coming will not be a cause of terror, but of rejoicing to them. The fears which many entertain, who it is hoped may be the children of God, do not proceed from love to Him, but from *the spirit of bondage* under which they are held, in consequence of not being fully persuaded of His love in Christ Jesus to all them that believe in His name. This *spirit of bondage to fear* is very distressing, *because fear hath torment.* How many persons are there who are harassed by these tormenting fears. Sometimes this fear arises from a sense of indwelling

³⁷ Acts xvii. 31.³⁸ 1 John ii. 28.³⁹ Eph. i. 4.

sin, and a consciousness of repeated transgressions against light and knowledge. These all the children of God have reason to acknowledge and lament; for *there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*⁴⁰ But since the gospel of Christ proclaims full and free pardon to the penitent sinner, whenever he humbly confesses his transgressions unto the Lord, and looks by faith to *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*; if this gospel be truly believed, and embraced with all the heart, it will produce love to Him who has had mercy upon us. And where love to God prevails, tormenting fear will be dismissed. There is indeed another kind of fear, which is a distinguishing characteristic of the child of God. It is said respecting this fear, *Happy is the man that feareth always.*⁴¹ To fear to offend and displease God by breaking His commandments, is the fear of a child, which is not only consistent with love, but actually proceeds from it. On the other hand, a fear of condemnation from the Judge of all the earth, while it disquiets and harasses the mind, proves that *he that feareth is not made perfect in love*. If we truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, this fear will be cast out; for we shall be assured that He, whom through His grace we are enabled to love, will own us as His children in that day.

⁴⁰ Eccles. vii. 20.

⁴¹ Prov. xxviii. 14.

The apostle therefore shows us how this fear may be dismissed, by saying, *We love Him because He first loved us.* By this consideration we are led to look off from ourselves, and to behold the wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, as the source of every blessing we enjoy or hope for. It is this which attracts our hearts to Him, and fills us with *joy and peace in believing*.⁴² Let us contemplate this love, that we may love Him in return, and may be enabled to look for His promised blessings to be vouchsafed to us; not for our merits, but for His mercies' sake. He said to His people of old, *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee*.⁴³ Let us beseech Him to draw our hearts to Himself by His loving-kindness, that we may love Him above all things, and trusting in His mercy, may rejoice in His salvation, realising its blessings in some measure here on earth, and looking forward with a good hope of partaking of its glories in the life to come.

The apostle again reverts to the subject with which he had set out, for the purpose of pressing it home upon the minds of believers in Christ. He asserts, *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* This is stated in order to prevent

⁴² Rom. xv. 13.

⁴³ Jer. xxxi. 3.

us from deceiving ourselves by an empty profession of love to God, from which no evident benefit is derived by our fellow-creatures. Unless we love the children of God, it is vain for us to think that we love God; it is a mere fancy that we indulge in our minds, which produces no beneficial effect. God is invisible, and therefore the only way in which we can prove that we truly love Him, is by showing that we love His image wherever it is displayed. We love the Father in His children; in like manner as when true love subsists between human beings, those who are most nearly connected with the beloved object, partake in some degree of the same feeling of regard and affection.

The apostle concludes in the words of the text, *This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.* This is the bounden duty of the children of God. If we profess to love God, and that He is our reconciled Father, we shall love those who, together with us, are also His children; we shall love them as our brethren, as those who are of the family and *household of faith.* The more true Christianity prevails, the more of this feeling will there be. But, alas, false profession and selfishness have almost rooted out this brotherly love from the Christian world, so that there is a great want of disinterestedness in professors of religion; and it is therefore needful to guard against imposition

on the one hand, and presumption on the other. Let us seek to cultivate love to God more and more, by considering how greatly He hath loved us; and then, while we maintain intercourse with Him, and live as in His presence, having His loving-kindness before our eyes, we shall endeavour to manifest love to the brethren, as we have opportunity, *not in word, neither in tongue only, but in deed and in truth*. It is the commandment of God that we should love Him above all things, with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. But oh! how far short of this do we fall! How feeble, how cold is our love to Him! Let us implore His mercy to pardon our want of love to Him, and His grace to enable us to love Him more and more. And let us not be satisfied with merely having this love in our hearts; but let us seek to give evidence of it to the glory of His holy name. Let us prove our love to Him by obedience to His commandments, by acts of kindness and love to the children of God, and by an anxiety to spread abroad the knowledge of His loving-kindness among all around us; by not being ashamed of Him, or His cause, or His people; but endeavouring to glorify Him in our life and conduct by all possible means. The religion of Christ is a religion of love. May we find it to be so in our own souls, and manifest it to be such in our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, to the glory of God our Saviour.

SERMON XXXVII.

FOR THE

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

FAITH AND LOVE.

1 John iii. 23, 24.

AND THIS IS **HIS** COMMANDMENT, THAT WE SHOULD BELIEVE ON THE NAME OF **HIS** SON **JESUS CHRIST**, AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AS **HE** GAVE US COMMANDMENT. AND HE THAT KEEPETH **HIS** COMMANDMENTS DWELLETH IN **HIM**, AND **HE** IN HIM; AND HEREBY WE KNOW THAT **HE** ABIDETH IN US, BY THE **SPIRIT** WHICH **HE** HATH GIVEN US.

IN the Epistle for last Sunday, as well as in the text, there is incidental mention made of the Three sacred Persons of the ever blessed Trinity; which may perhaps have been the reason why these two portions of scripture were appointed for the Epistles on the weeks which succeed Trinity Sunday.

The Epistle for this day breathes the spirit which is ascribed to St. John. It is said that his constant language in his old age was, "Little children, love one another." The benevolence which Christianity induces was unknown in the heathen world. The people among whom the first Christians lived were, we are told, accustomed to say of them, "See how these Christians love one another." But while this was their character, the superiority of their principles and practices to those of their fellow-creatures, excited the envy and hatred of the children of this world. The apostle found it necessary therefore to caution those whom he addressed, *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* He knew that the people of the world were disposed to act on the principles of *Cain, who slew his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*; and he therefore warned them against taking offence at the treatment they would experience as the servants and followers of the one living and true God. At the same time he showed them that the conduct of believers in Christ towards each other, is to be the opposite of that of the people of the world. They are to love as brethren, as children of the same Father who is in heaven. And he goes so far as to say, *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* The love of the children of God to each other, is a proof of their

having partaken of spiritual life; that they are not dead to God, but have been quickened by His grace to newness of life, and therefore *the fruit of the Spirit, which is love*,⁴⁴ appears in their conduct. While, on the other hand, *He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*, he is *dead in trespasses and sins*, and not alive to God; he *abideth* in the state of nature in which he was born, *a child of wrath, even as others*.⁴⁵

It is further said, *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer*, that is, he is under the curse of the law of God, guilty of breaking the sixth commandment; for he that hates another wishes he were dead, and would have him put out of his way, or kill him, if he could. A person who has such feelings towards his fellow-creatures, cannot *have passed from death unto life*; he cannot himself be in the way of salvation; *Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him*. This is true in a variety of senses. He that compasses the death of another, and he that causes the death of another from hatred or variance, and he that puts himself to death, are without hope of eternal life.

How opposite every thing of this kind is to the will of God respecting His creatures, appears from the consideration of His revealed character as the God of love, to which the apostle again

⁴⁴ Galatians v. 22.

⁴⁵ Ephesians ii. 1, 3.

recurs. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.* The words of *God* are in italics; which shows that they were not in the copy of the original which was before our translators. They appear, however, in the first printed edition of the Greek Testament, (the Complutensian) but are not to be found in any of the old manuscripts now in existence. There is not much difference in the meaning, whether they be inserted or omitted; as the word *He*, which follows, evidently refers to our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the apostle often speaks in this abrupt manner. It was the love of God, as He Himself declared, which provided a Redeemer to lay down His life for us, and so to *deliver us from the wrath to come.* Had not He laid down His life for us, we could have no hope of eternal life. What love was it that led Him to do this! The contemplation of the love of God our Saviour ought to lead us to imitate Him in our conduct; *We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* Nothing can be too much for us to do for Christ's sake. The love of Christ ought to constrain us, so that we should be willing to give up our lives for Him; and if we truly love Him, we shall also love the members of His mystical body, and be desirous of promoting their benefit both in their souls and bodies. We see how the apostle Paul laid himself out from love to Christ to promote His cause, and benefit His people.

He speaks of rejoicing *in his sufferings for them*, and of filling up *that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in his flesh, for His body's sake, which is the church*; ⁴⁶ or exposing himself to persecution for their benefit. But here the apostle St. John refers to the duty of endeavouring to alleviate the distresses of the poorer members of the flock of Christ; for he adds, *Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* Christians should be willing to relieve the distresses of their poorer brethren, as far as they have it in their power. Being sensible of the goodness of God to themselves, that they have received mercy, and are debtors to Divine mercy continually, they will be compassionate to the distresses of others, and especially to those of the *household of faith*.

To enforce this more effectually, the apostle exhorts, *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth*. Some professors are great talkers about religion. They ought to be so much the more *doers of the word*, ⁴⁷ in order to adorn their profession. It is not by the fluency of our language on religious subjects, but by the production of *the fruit of the Spirit*, which is in *all goodness and righteousness and truth*; ⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Colossians i. 24. ⁴⁷ James i. 22. ⁴⁸ Ephesians v. 9.

that the unfeignedness of our faith will be ascertained. *And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.* If the love of Christ possess our hearts, and influence our conduct, then we have evidence that we are Christians indeed; and shall have a comfortable persuasion of our acceptance with our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus. *But if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.* If we are conscious that we are not actuated by the love of Christ, to give up ourselves to the service of God, and to live to His glory, we may be assured that this is known to the Searcher of hearts. We cannot deceive Him. It becomes us therefore to humble ourselves before Him, and to implore His pardoning mercy for the past, and His grace to enable us truly to turn to Him, and to do His will, or to live in obedience to what He has enjoined upon us in His holy word. The apostle addresses Christians, *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.* This does not mean self-confidence, but liberty of speech in His presence, at His footstool; coming *boldly to the throne of grace.* A consciousness that we are acting contrary to the will of God, makes us backward to come into His presence. But when we are desirous to do His will, we feel our need of His help to enable us to fulfil it, and therefore we present our supplications earnestly before

Him. *And then, whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.* We are agreed with Him in the spirit of our minds, and therefore walk together with Him in humility, being assured of our acceptance with Him, not for our own merits, but for the sake of our Mediator and Advocate, *Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins.*⁴⁹ The apostle then states, in the text,

First, The great commandment of God, to which His people have respect above all things.

Secondly, The consolation which is derived from it; and

Thirdly, The means whereby it is obeyed.

Let us now consider these topics more particularly, praying that the blessing of the Holy Spirit may be vouchsafed to us.

First, The great commandment of God is here referred to in both its parts. *This is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ; and love one another, as He gave us commandment.* The New Testament inculcates continually, that there can be no Christian practice without Christian faith. For this reason the apostle declares, in the first place, the need we have of faith in Christ. We must receive Him who was *God manifest in the flesh* as our Saviour, we

⁴⁹ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

must have our sins pardoned through faith in His redemption, we must be accepted in the presence of God through His merits, or we cannot look up to the God of heaven as our reconciled Father. What Christ did and suffered in human nature, must be our sole dependence for every blessing we need, or hope to obtain from the God of all grace. For in ourselves we are utterly unworthy of the least regard or notice of our Creator, because we have not answered the end of our creation, but have rebelled against Him. It is, however, *with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness*.⁵⁰ A faith which does not influence the heart, or the affections, and does not govern the life and conduct, is worth nothing. It is a dead, and not a living faith. A heartfelt conviction of our sin and misery, of our need and helplessness, is absolutely necessary, in order to our fleeing *for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us*⁵¹ in the gospel of Christ. Without this our profession of religion will be merely an adopting of the sentiments of others, instead of partaking of a benefit for ourselves. And how much is this the case with the multitude of those who call themselves Christians. They take up the religion of their neighbours, instead of seeking to have a right understanding of Divine truth, that they may enjoy for themselves the blessings which Christ-

⁵⁰ Romans x. 10.

⁵¹ Hebrews vi. 18.

ianity confers. Unless the Lord Jesus Christ be our hope and trust, because we feel our need of being interested in His great salvation, we know nothing of Christianity to a saving purpose. Without Him we are lost, without Him we must perish everlastingly. He came to save us from perdition. But if our cry be not, *Lord, save us, we perish*,⁵² we shall obtain no relief from Him. As the Son of God, He is the Saviour of sinners. But it is not enough for us to hear of Him as such; we must apply to Him for ourselves, or He will not be our Saviour; we shall not know Him in this gracious character. His name was called Jesus, because He should *save His people from their sins*. He was *Emmanuel, God with us*,⁵³ for this purpose. As the Christ, He was anointed of God to this end; the Spirit was given to Him without measure, in human nature, to qualify Him for doing and suffering, or accomplishing all the will of God; in consequence of which He *finished the work* which was given Him *to do*,⁵³ and has "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers" in His name. *God so loved the world*,⁵³ as to give to mankind this Saviour; and He has commanded that the children of men should receive Him as such, should put their trust in Him and be saved. The consequence is, when a man truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, with all

⁵² Matt. viii. 25; i. 21, 23.

⁵³ John xvii. 4; iii. 16.

his heart, he becomes interested in His great salvation and all its blessings; his sins are forgiven him through faith in the redemption of Christ, because the Lamb of God suffered the punishment which our sins deserved, and *put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*.⁵⁴ He is accepted with God through faith in Christ, his Mediator and Advocate; he is reconciled to God, at peace with Him, justified before Him, by faith. He is adopted into His family, so that he calls upon God, in *the spirit of adoption*, crying, *Abba, Father*.⁵⁵ He is made a partaker of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby he is conformed to the Divine image, and is strengthened to resist all his spiritual enemies. And he is enabled to look forward to eternity with a good hope through grace, and to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*,⁵⁴ which by sin he had forfeited.

It is the *commandment* of God, *that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ*, in order that all this blessedness may be our portion. Let us seek His grace, that we may be enabled so to do. Great is the blessedness of believing in Christ. May we enjoy it to the glory of God, and our own consolation and salvation. Who has such reason to be happy as the humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? It

⁵⁴ Hebrews ix. 26.

⁵⁵ Romans viii. 15; v. 2.

is his privilege to look up continually to God as his Father, and to look forward to heaven as his home; and to *know that all things shall work together for good to*⁵⁶ him, both here and hereafter. While he casts all his care upon God, he possesses peace and consolation in the midst of all the changes and uncertainties of this mortal life; and he looks beyond them all to the rest which remaineth for the people of God in His eternal kingdom and glory.

How important is it that this blessedness should be our portion. Let us not rest satisfied without obtaining it. It is to be enjoyed now by the believer in Jesus. Let us then ask ourselves, Do we obey the Divine command here set before us? Do we believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God? Do we put our trust in Him as all our salvation and all our desire? If so, do we enjoy the comfort of it? Does our faith make us happy? It is designed to produce this effect. Does it make us holy? If not, it cannot be *faith unfeigned*.⁵⁷ Does it lead us to love Him, who *hath loved us and hath given Himself for us*,⁵⁸ and to devote ourselves to His service in heart and lip and life? This is the object proposed by it. May we not only make an outward profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but enjoy its consolations, and *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*

⁵⁶ Rom. viii. 28.⁵⁷ 1 Tim. i. 5.⁵⁸ Eph. v. 2.

*in all things,*⁵⁹ that His name may be glorified in us and by us.

There is another thing, however, respecting which God has given us commandment. *His commandment* is not only *that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ*; which is the first and great commandment; but also that we should *love one another, as He gave us commandment*. This our Saviour enforced upon all His disciples, on all who believe in His name. He said to them, *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you*. And again, *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.*⁶⁰ The children of God should love one another as members of the same family, who all call upon God as their Father. It may be proper however to remark, that it was not intended by this exhortation, that the relative situations in life of believers in Christ should be altered, but that all the members of His mystical body should have a fellow-feeling for each other, or a mutual kindness and sympathy arising from the spiritual relationship in which they stand to each other as members of that body, of which Christ is the Head. When the apostle Paul speaks on this

⁵⁹ Titus ii. 10.

⁶⁰ John xv. 12; xiii. 34, 35.

subject, of believers being one body in Christ, he says respecting this sympathy among them, *Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*⁶¹ That love should be manifest among Christians, which leads them to *be kind one to another, and tender hearted ;*⁶² to *put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, and above all charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*⁶³ All these gracious feelings are to be manifested as occasion requires. These are the dispositions which true Christianity inculcates ; and where its influence is felt, they will be exhibited to the praise and glory of God. The text mentions,

Secondly, The consolation derived from obedience to the commandments of God. *He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him.* God is pleased to take up His abode in the hearts of His believing and obedient people, according to His gracious promise, *I will dwell in them and walk in them.* He admits them to the enjoyment of communion and fellowship with Himself ; and He graciously manifests His presence to them as He does not to the world. He draws nigh to their souls, and enables them to draw nigh to Him in prayer and praise ; so

⁶¹ 1 Cor. xii. 26.⁶² Eph. iv. 32.⁶³ Col. iii. 12, 14.

that they *have confidence toward Him*, and *pour out their heart before Him*,⁶⁴ and they find Him to be the Hearer and Answerer of the humble supplications which they present at His footstool, that He does not cast out their prayer, but grants them those blessings which they need. They dwell in Him by realizing His presence, and having communion with Him in the spirit of their minds. They lift up their hearts unto the Lord, and cast all their care, every cause of anxiety and disquietude, upon Him; and He manifests His care for them, by ordering all things for them in providence and in grace, as shall be most for His glory, and for their good. He dwells in them, by comforting their hearts and stablishing them in every good word and work; making them happy in the enjoyment of a sense of His favour, causing *the peace of God which passeth all understanding, to keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*,⁶⁵ and enabling them to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*⁶⁶ hereafter. It is the privilege of those who *keep His commandments* to enjoy this consolation, but of no others. We must believe in Christ, and love those who are, with us, *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*,⁶⁶ if we would partake of this blessedness. But lest any persons should think that any merit is to be ascribed to themselves in this matter, the text specifies, in the

⁶⁴ Psalm lxii. 8. ⁶⁵ Phil. iv. 7. ⁶⁶ Rom. v. 2; viii. 17.

Third place, The means whereby the command is obeyed, and the manner in which the promised blessing is conveyed. Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us. It is by the gracious influence of the Spirit of God upon our souls, that we are enabled to believe in Christ, and to walk in love towards the members of His mystical body. And it is by the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given to us, that we are assured of the fulfilment of the promises of His grace to our souls, and that our profession of faith in Christ is not a delusion. Wherever God is pleased to take up His abode as the God of peace, it is that He may sanctify His people wholly, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁶⁷ that when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day,⁶⁸ they may be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy;⁶⁹ and may receive that blessing which He shall then pronounce to them that love and fear Him, saying, Come, ye blessed children of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.⁷⁰ When God abideth in His people, He gives His good Spirit to instruct them;⁷¹ to teach them all things⁷² needful to be known in order to their

⁶⁷ 1 Thess. v. 23. ⁶⁸ 2 Thess. i. 10. ⁶⁹ Jude 24. ⁷⁰ Matt. xxv. 34.

comfort and salvation ; to strengthen them to resist Satan and all their spiritual enemies, and to walk in His holy ways, doing what is pleasing in His sight, doing the will of God from the heart.

Let us examine ourselves, to ascertain whether we have this evidence of being the *habitation of God through the Spirit*. Are we *strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man*,⁷³ to *fight the good fight of faith*, and to *lay hold on eternal life, whereunto we are called*⁷⁴ by the gospel of Christ? If our faith and hope be in Christ; if we are influenced and actuated by His Spirit; if we walk with God, and *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*, all will be well. But if we rest in a speculative religion, which brings no spiritual life to the soul, and does not produce obedience to the word and will of God in the conduct, we have reason to fear lest we should deceive ourselves, and fail of obtaining that everlasting salvation of which it is the object of the gospel of Christ to put us in possession. May we be taught and led by the Spirit of God, that the blessings of this salvation may be ours in time and in eternity.

⁷¹ Neh. ix. 20. ⁷² John xiv. 26. ⁷³ Eph. ii. 22; iii. 16. ⁷⁴ 1 Tim. v. 12.

SERMON XXXVIII.

FOR THE

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

AFFLICTION THE PATH TO GLORY.

1 Peter v. 10, 11.

BUT THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, WHO HATH CALLED US UNTO HIS ETERNAL GLORY BY CHRIST JESUS, AFTER THAT YE HAVE SUFFERED AWHILE, MAKE YOU PERFECT, STABILISH, STRENGTHEN, SETTLE YOU. TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION, FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN.

THE Christian's course through this world, and its blessed termination, are the principal subjects referred to in these words. They are introduced, in the Epistle for this day, by exhortations for the direction, admonition, and consolation of the people of God, while they are passing through this transitory life, to the rest which remaineth for them in His everlasting kingdom.

The first exhortation is, *All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.* Humbleness of mind is to characterise the children of God in all their conduct. He who knows himself, knows that he has sufficient cause to be humble, and not to think highly of himself. But a reason is here given why humility of mind is to be cultivated. *For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* He setteth Himself in array, as it were, against those who exalt themselves; but to those who are abased at His footstool, He manifests Himself to be *the God of all grace*, ready to bestow the blessings of His grace upon their souls. This being the case, the inference is drawn, *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.* Before honour is humility. He graciously regards those who are lowly in their own eyes, and are abased at His footstool, that He may cheer and comfort their hearts, may raise them to enjoy communion with Himself, and bless them *with all the spiritual blessings* that are enjoyed *in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*⁷⁵ Such honour have all His saints, who are humbled at His feet to receive His words, who desire and seek the instruction of heavenly wisdom. And He will exalt them hereafter to the throne of His glory, to rejoice in His salvation for ever-

⁷⁵ Ephesians i. 3.

more. Let us comply with the apostolical exhortation, that we may receive the blessing.

But it is intimated that adversity, or being in circumstances of distress or difficulty, is that which usually brings down the high thoughts that we have of ourselves. Before affliction, the heart of man is haughty. God humbles His people by affliction of mind, body, or estate. When distress brings them low, then they are exhorted to *cast all their care upon Him*; under the assurance that *He careth for them*. They may well dismiss every cause of anxiety and distress, when they are assured that He who has all things under His control, interests Himself in their concerns; and will order all things in providence and in grace for them, while they commit their way to Him, and cast their burden upon Him. What a wonderful declaration is this; *He careth for you. We have not a High Priest, says another apostle, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.*⁷⁶ But the Lord our God is said so deeply to sympathise with His people in their distresses, that we are told, that *in all their afflictions He was afflicted.*⁷⁷ When He sends affliction to His people, He does it for their benefit, to do them good in their latter end; that they may humble themselves at His footstool, and He may bless them more abundantly

⁷⁶ Hebrews iv. 15.

⁷⁷ Isaiah lxiii. 9.

than before. Let us then place our confidence in Him, and acknowledge Him in all our ways; and then we may rest assured that He will bring good out of every seeming evil, and will cause all things to work together for our good and for His own glory.

But as the great enemy of mankind is ever ready to take advantage of the circumstances in which we may be placed, in order to excite in us distrust towards God, and to lead us to think hardly of Him when we are afflicted, the apostle cautions Christians to be on their guard against his devices. *Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* This is a statement calculated to excite alarm. We have a powerful adversary, who is seeking our destruction. He is ever on the alert for this purpose; *going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it.*⁷⁸ He is compared to a lion that roars after its prey, and terrifies it into submission, and then seizes upon it without remorse, and devours it. So Satan acts towards mankind. It is needful therefore, in order that we may not be destroyed by him, that we should *be sober and vigilant*; that we should *not sleep as do others, but watch and be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation*;⁷⁹ or, as it is

⁷⁸ Job i. 7.

⁷⁹ 1 Thessalonians v. 6, 8.

here said, *Whom resist stedfast in the faith; that is, continuing in it grounded and settled, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.*⁸⁰ This is the way in which our spiritual adversary is to be resisted. We are to rely upon the promises made in the word of God, and to seek for their fulfilment, and be assured that Divine aid will be vouchsafed in the time of need to those who wait upon God. And therefore we are not to *be moved by the afflictions* which we may be called to endure, not to *be wearied and faint in our minds*⁸¹ on account of them; but to be satisfied *that all things shall work together for good to them that love God.*⁸² And, *knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren in the world, (for if ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons,)* while we resist our adversary the devil, we are to *be in subjection unto the Father of spirits,*⁸¹ believing that He doeth all things well; and that we shall find hereafter *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us;*⁸² and that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*⁸³ Let us not then be terrified at the power, or give way to the temptations of our *adversary the devil;* but let us resist him, *stedfast in faith,* assured of victory through the might of our Lord

⁸⁰ Col. i. 23. ⁸¹ Heb. xii. 3, 7, 9. ⁸² Rom. viii. 28, 18. ⁸³ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Jesus Christ; and not doubting that the prayer of the apostle in the text will be answered when we offer it up for ourselves; and that we shall have cause to rejoice in ascribing the praise here given to the Hearer of the prayers of His people. To this supplication let us now direct our attention; observing,

First, To whom it is addressed.

Secondly, The state of the children of God in this world.

Thirdly, The object proposed by the dealings of God in His providence towards them.

Fourthly, The blessedness that awaits them; and

Lastly, The gratitude and praise which it becomes them to manifest and ascribe to Him who has mercy upon them.

May the Spirit of God seal instruction upon our minds while we consider these topics, that we may be edified, admonished, and comforted, and His great name may be glorified in us and by us. We are to notice,

First, To whom the prayer in the text is addressed: *The God of all grace*. This title describes the character of Him from whom is derived every blessing that we enjoy; in whom *we live and move and have our being*; who *giveth to all life and breath and all things*;⁸⁴ who *giveth us*

⁸⁴ Acts xvii. 28, 25.

*richly all things to enjoy.*⁸⁴ St. James says of Him, *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*⁸⁵ And St. Paul observes respecting Him in this character, with regard to His believing people, *God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*⁸⁶ As the God of all grace, He is the God of salvation. *By His grace we are saved.* The apostle says, *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.*⁸⁶ It was the grace of God that provided a Saviour for lost sinners. It was the grace of the Saviour which brought Him from heaven to earth to redeem us. It is the grace of the Spirit which quickens the dead in trespasses and sins to newness of life. And it is Divine grace which supplies all the wants, spiritual and temporal, of the children of God, while they are passing through this life; and when it comes to a close, when the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, shall have been completed, the *head stone* of the spiritual building *shall be brought*

⁸⁴ 1 Tim. v. 17. ⁸⁵ James i. 17, 18. ⁸⁶ 2 Cor. ix. 8; viii. 9. ⁸⁷ Zech. iv. 7.

*forth with shoutings of grace, grace unto it.*⁸⁷ It shall be acknowledged that grace began, grace carried on, and grace completed the work of salvation, that to *the God of all grace* the glory may be ascribed for evermore. What encouragement may we sinners derive from the consideration of the Lord our God being pleased to take to Himself the title of *the God of all grace*. It may encourage us to put our trust in Him at all times, to pour out our hearts before Him, to make Him our refuge; and we may be assured in consequence of it, that He will withhold no good thing from us, but will give us grace and glory, when we seek these blessings from Him, to the praise of His holy name. This title is given by the apostle to the Lord God, particularly in reference to the state of the children of God in this world; which is described as a state of suffering. This is to be noticed, in the

Second place: After that ye have suffered awhile. The life of man in this world may be termed a life of suffering, when we consider the evils to which we are all of us continually exposed, the diseases to which we are liable, the pains of body and mind to which we are subject. But the child of God is peculiarly a sufferer in this world, in consequence of having renounced the dominion of his spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, which are therefore opposed to him. Our Saviour, on this account, warned

His disciples, *In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*⁸⁸ The world that lieth in wickedness⁸⁹ is opposed to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. *They think it strange that he runs not with them to the same excess of riot, as that in which they indulge themselves, and therefore speak evil of him.*⁹⁰ But the more sober part of the world is opposed to the true Christian, as well as the licentious and profane. They are offended because he *cannot* with them *serve both God and mammon*, the two opposite masters, whose service they vainly endeavour to reconcile. The self-righteous formalist and the licentious sensualist unite together in opposition to the humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. This our Saviour taught His disciples to expect, when He said to them, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* And He further declared to them, *If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also; but all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me.*⁸⁸ To this persecution the first Christians were eminently ex-

⁸⁸ John xvi.33; xv. 18—21. ⁸⁹ 1 John v.19. ⁹⁰ 1 Peter iv. 4.

posed. The history of the Acts of the Apostles of Christ shows the sufferings which they endured, wherever they carried the message of pardon and peace with God; and those which their followers, who received the truths of the gospel of Christ, met with from both Jews and Gentiles. Notwithstanding, this blessed gospel, in due time, triumphed over all the opposition which it encountered; and became, as to its outward profession, the religion of the Roman empire.

The true Christian suffers in this world, however, not only from the persecution of the open enemies of the gospel of Christ, but from its false professors; who, while *they profess to know God, in works deny Him*.⁹¹ He also suffers from his indwelling foe, the corruption of his own nature, *the flesh, with its affections and lusts*,⁹² which he is commanded to mortify and crucify. These war against his soul, and cause him to exclaim, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death*.⁹³ He suffers likewise from the fiery darts, the evil suggestions, and the deceitful temptations and devices of the devil. And as long as he is in the body, he is continually liable to be assaulted in one way or other by these enemies of his peace. He must not expect to be freed from them while he is here on earth. He is a sufferer in some respect or other

⁹¹ Titus i. 16. ⁹² Galatians v. 24. ⁹³ Romans vii. 24.

all the days of his life. He may expect suffering to follow him, as surely as in the ocean wave follows wave, till he reaches the shore, or the haven of eternal rest. But the text shows us,

Thirdly, The object proposed by the dealings of God in His providence towards His people, by permitting them to suffer affliction; and that is, that He may *make* them *perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle them*. This relates to the character which they are to sustain in this world as the followers of Christ. And it is by means of the sufferings which they endure that this end is accomplished. The word rendered *make perfect*, is said to relate to the setting of a disjoined limb, or a broken bone; and is used in describing the occupation of the disciples of Christ in *mending their nets*.⁹⁴ It may thus be applied to the healing of the broken hearted, and the binding up of their wounds. When the sinner is humbled before God, under a conviction of sin wrought in the conscience by the Spirit of God, he prays earnestly for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace to be vouchsafed to his soul, that he may enjoy a sense of the Divine favour, being reconciled to God and at peace with Him. These blessings *the God of all grace* is ever ready to bestow upon His waiting people, that they may experience the joys of His salvation,

⁹⁴ Matthew iv. 21.

and consolations which are not to be derived from any other source; and may thus partake of union and communion with Him. To be made *perfect* then is to be restored to the enjoyment of spiritual health, in communion and fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the influence of the Holy Ghost. Let us seek for this happiness, that we may go on our way rejoicing in His holy name. His word declares, *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.*⁹⁵ This is Christian perfection, to have the conscience at peace with God, through a reliance on the peace-speaking blood of Jesus Christ. Those who are thus at peace with God, walk humbly with Him and circumspectly before Him. They *draw near to Him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water;*⁹⁶ being *washed* and *sanctified* and *justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*⁹⁷ Let us seek to enjoy this perfection of peace and happiness, to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls.

The next thing mentioned as an end to be answered is, being established,—*stablish* you. This is generally used in reference to the faith of the gospel. Our apostle so applies it, when

⁹⁵ Isaiah xxvi. 3.⁹⁶ Heb. x. 22.⁹⁷ I Cor. vi. 11.

he says, *I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.*⁹⁸ By means of affliction the children of God are led to seek earnestly for the fulfilment of His promises, and so to find that He is faithful to His word on which He hath caused them to hope; and thus they are firmly fixed in a persuasion of the truth of the word of God, whereby their hearts are comforted, and they are established *in every good word and work.*⁹⁹ Let us seek for this establishment in the faith, that we may not be *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*¹

The next benefit sought is, to be *strengthened*. Affliction shows us our weakness and helplessness; and therefore, by means of it, we are led to seek for Divine strength to be communicated to us, that we may be strengthened with strength in our souls; and thus *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*¹ Let us seek for His strength to be perfected in our weakness, and we shall find His grace to be sufficient for us in every time of need.

The last thing mentioned in this prayer is, that the believer in Christ may be *settled* upon the sure foundation, or immoveably fixed upon it. The apostle prayed for the Christians at

⁹⁸ 2 Peter i. 12. ⁹⁹ 2 Thess. iii. 17. ¹ Eph. iv. 14; vi. 10.

Ephesus that they might be *rooted and grounded in love*, so as to know the love of Christ which *passeth knowledge*.² This is the thing which settles the mind, and constrains those who are grounded in it to *live not unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again*.³ May we thus *continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel which we have heard*.⁴ Let it be our prayer that *the God of all grace may make us perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle us*, that we may live to His glory, and show forth His praise in all our conduct and conversation. The apostle speaks,

Fourthly, Of the blessedness that awaits the suffering children of God. *The God of all grace hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus*. What a high destination is this! How wonderful is it, that those who are suffering here on earth because they are sinners, suffering being the natural consequence of sin, should be spoken of as being *called by God unto His eternal glory*. And yet how is this disregarded by the children of men. How little is the hope of it encouraged; how slow of heart are we to believe it; how faint are our desires after it! To this *eternal glory God hath called us*, the sinful children of men, *by Christ Jesus*; by giving His beloved Son to be our Redeemer; by giving Him to shed His precious

² Eph. iii. 17, 19.³ 2 Cor. v. 15.⁴ Col. i. 23.

blood for our ransom, that He might put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, that in Him *we might have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us.*⁵ Oh that our hearts were animated by this subject as they ought to be; that gratitude for redeeming love possessed our souls, as it ought to do; and that putting our trust in *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,*⁶ we might be enabled to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God,*⁷ as it is the privilege of the children of God to do; believing that *the God of all grace hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus*; and therefore as surely as our faith and hope are in Him, so surely shall we be put in possession of it, when we have done with all things here below. It is the privilege of the believer in Christ to be assured of this, because of the faithfulness of God to His word, on which He caused him to hope.

When the apostle contemplated this great object proposed by *the God of all grace* in all His dealings with His people, he could not avoid expressing his grateful admiration of it, by saying, *To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* This is the

Last point to be noticed. It becomes us, by such ascriptions of praise, to manifest our grati-

⁵ Eph. i. 7, 8.

⁶ John i. 29.

⁷ Rom. v. 2.

tude to Him who has had mercy upon us, who hath shown such grace to His unworthy creatures, as to overrule for our good the sufferings which sin has brought upon us; to lead us to seek to Him to *make us perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle* us; who, of His wonderful grace and lovingkindness, notwithstanding our utter unworthiness of so great a blessing, *hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus*. Let us give to Him the glory which is justly due to His name, for His goodness and mercy vouchsafed to us. As those who are not our own, but *are bought with a price*, let us *glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's*.⁸ Let us acknowledge His dominion over us, submit to His authority, and trust in His mighty power; looking to Him to *guide us with His counsel* through this life, and believing that He will *afterward receive us to glory*; when all the promises of His grace will be fulfilled to us, and we shall be enabled to rejoice in His salvation throughout eternity; and sing, *Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*.⁹

⁸ 1 Corinthians vi. 20.

⁹ Revelation i. 5, 6.

SERMON XXXIX.

FOR THE

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GROANING OF CREATION.

Romans viii. 22, 23.

FOR WE KNOW THAT THE WHOLE CREATION GROANETH AND TRAVAILETH IN PAIN TOGETHER UNTIL NOW; AND NOT ONLY THEY, BUT OURSELVES ALSO, WHICH HAVE THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, EVEN WE OURSELVES GROAN WITHIN OURSELVES, WAITING FOR THE ADOPTION, TO WIT, THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY.

THE misery which sin has introduced into the world, is here described in a manner which comes home to the feelings of mankind. *We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened with a body of sin and death. We are exposed to pain of body and mind, because we are sinners against God, both by nature and by practice.*

But it is the privilege of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to look beyond this perishing world, with a good hope through grace, to a time when he shall be delivered from all the evils to which he is exposed in this life, and shall be glorified together with his Lord and Saviour in His eternal kingdom and glory. Having this hope, he presses forward in the narrow way to the kingdom of heaven; seeking to have all the dispensations of God sanctified to him, to lead him to live above the world, and to have his heart and mind more set upon the blessedness which is reserved for him hereafter.

In the Epistle for this day, the apostle begins with instituting a comparison between the present sufferings of the Christian in this life, and his future blessedness. He says, *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* He had before intimated that the believer in Christ must expect to be a sufferer in this world, as his Lord and Master was before him. The mind of man naturally shrinks from suffering. Yet all are liable to it in one degree or another on account of sin, which "brought death into the world, and all our woe." But the Christian is a sufferer also in consequence of his religious profession; a sufferer from the power of his spiritual enemies, whose dominion he renounced in baptism. His adversary, the devil,

goeth about seeking to devour him, and must be resisted. Satan tempts him by stirring up the evil passions of his corrupt nature, and by exciting the children of this world to oppose him, or to endeavour to ensnare him. The enemy of God does all that he can to make the Christian suffer by his temptations and assaults, and by the influence which he possesses over the people of the world, whom he sets on to oppose and persecute the children of God. This was particularly the case in the first ages of Christianity.

Our apostle therefore takes off their attention from their present sufferings to their future glory; *the glory which shall be revealed in us, when Christ who is our life shall appear, and we also shall appear with Him in glory.*¹⁰ He describes mankind as having a consciousness of their immortality, and looking forward to it with a degree of anxiety. *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.* The hopes and desires of mankind, however clouded by ignorance and unbelief and love of this present evil world, are yet unconsciously, as it were, directed to a future state; and when their reflections are turned towards it, they cannot but hope, however faint and unfounded that hope may be, that they shall partake of the happiness of the children of God in eternity. But this is

¹⁰ Colossians iii. 4.

the peculiar subject of anxiety and longing expectation with those who are deeply sensible of the importance of things unseen and eternal. They are looking forward to the time when it shall be made manifest who are the sons of God; with an humble hope that they shall themselves be found among the number of those to whom the King of glory shall say, *Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*¹¹ How important is it that we should direct our desires and expectations to the great day of *the manifestation of the sons of God*; and should have a good hope through grace of being found among them. How grievous, it is to be feared, will be the disappointment of many, on finding themselves excluded from this blessed company, because they did not *give diligence to make their calling and election sure*;¹² but trifled with their day of grace, while the things which belonged to their everlasting peace and salvation were set before them. If we shall not then be found among the sons of God, how awful will our state be. May we lay it to heart in time; and not be satisfied with merely having an expectation of immortality; but have also a hope of everlasting salvation through Christ.

The apostle proceeds to describe the present

¹¹ Matthew xxv. 34.

¹² 2 Peter i. 10.

state of mankind, *The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same.* By the word *vanity* we are to understand sin and death. We are sinners as we come into the world; and, as sinners, we are dying creatures. We none of us know what a day may bring forth, or how soon we may be numbered among the silent dead. And when the time of our departure comes, *no man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit;*¹³ none have power to deliver themselves from death; but the body returns to the dust, and the spirit to God who gave it, to render an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad. This perishing condition of mankind was introduced by the fall of our first parents. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*¹⁴

But, blessed be God, His word reveals to fallen man a hope beyond the grave; a hope to which the creature who is sensible of his degraded state by reason of sin, of the misery to which he is exposed by means of it both here and hereafter, clings with the fondest expectation; a hope which the gospel of Christ sets before him; a hope that *the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption*

¹³ Ecclesiastes viii. 8.

¹⁴ Romans v. 12.

into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This deliverance of mankind from the ruin of the fall, from the vanity and corruption to which we are subjected in consequence of the fall of our first parents, is obtained through Christ, *who delivered us from the wrath to come;*¹⁵ *in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*¹⁶ Through Him pardon and salvation are freely bestowed upon the sinful children of men; and whosoever will, is welcome to receive the blessing; it will not be denied to any humble suppliant at the foot of the cross. All who humbly hope for pardon through His blood, who confess their sins at His footstool, and seek grace to enable them to forsake their evil thoughts and ways, shall be delivered *from the bondage of corruption*, or the dominion of sin, and shall be admitted *into the glorious liberty of the children of God*; for, *being made free from sin, and become servants to God, they have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*¹⁷ His service is perfect freedom. They partake of the liberty wherewith Christ makes them free here on earth; and they look forward in hope to *the glory which shall be revealed* hereafter, when they shall rejoice in His salvation for evermore.

In the text the apostle describes more par-

¹⁵ 1 Thess. i. 10.

¹⁶ Eph. i. 7.

¹⁷ Rom. vi. 22.

ticularly the misery brought upon all mankind by the fall of our first parents. This he further intimates to be the state of the child of God in this world, as well as of others, whose character and future hopes are here mentioned. These are subjects in which we are all of us deeply interested. May the Spirit of God seal instruction upon our minds while we consider them.

First, The misery brought upon all mankind by the fall of our first parents is here described. *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.* This is a matter of universal knowledge and experience among mankind. Some persons have supposed that the expression, *the whole creation*, must relate to the animal creation as well as to all rational creatures. But from the contrast made in the text, between all mankind, in this verse, and the children of God, in the next, it seems evident that rational beings alone are meant. And further, as the word *creature*, the same as that rendered *creation*, is used several times in the course of a few verses as applicable to mankind only, it is not likely that there would be a change in its meaning merely by the addition of the word *all*, or *the whole*. But the same words are used when our Saviour commanded His apostles to *go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*;¹⁸ and when our apostle speaks of *the gospel being preached to every crea-*

*ture under heaven.*¹⁹ So that its meaning appears to be very clear. It is said, however, that the sin of man has entailed misery and pain on the brute creation. And it is true that every thing in this world is out of course by reason of sin; but animals have no groaning or pain with regard to futurity; their pains are all circumscribed by this life, and they have no prospect beyond it.

The groaning and travailing in pain, of which the text speaks, arises from mankind being *subject to vanity*, to sin and death, being by nature born in sin and the children of wrath, and as the natural consequence, being *all their lifetime subject to bondage*,²⁰ *the bondage of corruption*. All persons who have any serious reflection,—and this will obtrude itself at one time or another upon every human being, who is conscious of his fallen state,—feel this groaning and these pangs, this anguish of mind respecting eternity. The ravages of death upon all around us, and the consciousness that we must die, that the time will assuredly come, when our mortal spirit must quit its tenement of clay, cannot but cause some anxiety as to whether it will soar to heaven, or sink down to hell; whether eternal life or everlasting destruction will be our portion when we leave this world. Hence it is that so many schemes have been devised by sinful men, to lull

¹⁸ Mark xvi. 15.¹⁹ Col. i. 23.²⁰ Heb. ii. 15.

their minds into a state of security, and give them a hope, though a delusive one, of escaping the consequences of sin in eternity. Death is called *the king of terrors*,²¹ and as such he is regarded by the multitude of mankind, not without cause, since *it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*.²² The instructed and informed mind cannot but feel a dread of the awful scrutiny of the Searcher of hearts in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. *For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known. Whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house tops*.²³ Such is the statement of our blessed Saviour on the subject. The apprehension of this *day of the Lord*, which *will come as a thief in the night*,²⁴ cannot but occasion, in many, anguish of spirit or pain of mind, which will be manifested by secret sighing and groaning, if the conscience be at all awakened by a sense of our natural condition as we come into the world, and the consequences of it.

But independently of this, because of sin the world is fitly compared to a hospital, filled with patients who have each their own sickness, and their own sore; and who, instead of affording

²¹ Job xviii. 14. ²² Heb. ix. 27. ²³ Luke xii. 2, 3. ²⁴ 2 Peter iii. 10.

relief to each other, are endeavouring to increase the misery and woe of all around them. The world is filled with groaning and pain, both of body and mind. How dreadful are the diseases to which we are exposed. What numerous accidents, as they are called, are continually occurring, which are the cause of suffering and distress. What losses of friends or of property are mankind liable to, which bring anguish of spirit and pain of mind. When we look around us upon the world at large, may we not ask, Where is the man who has not some secret or open cause of sorrow, grief, and pain, at one time or another? May it not be truly said, *The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together*, into whatever quarter we may look? This is the actual state of mankind, and a lamentable state it is. Misery and distress appear in all directions; and in numberless instances without hope of relief in that respect which is of the greatest importance; for those who know not the gospel of Christ are described as *having no hope, and without God in the world*,²⁵ they have no God to go to for relief, they cannot look up to Him as their Father and their Friend, and hope for relief from Him, and they have no good hope of happiness beyond this life; their condition is therefore most deplorable. But the apostle intimates,

²⁵ Ephesians ii, 12.

Secondly, That this is also the state of the children of God in this world. They are exposed, as well as others, to pain of body and anguish of mind. *And not only they*, mankind in general, *but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves.* The expression used to characterise the children of God is a very remarkable one. They *have the first fruits of the Spirit*. As the first fruits of the ground are a pledge and earnest of the harvest that is to follow; so the gift of the Spirit of God to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, is to them an earnest of the blessedness which awaits them hereafter, as well as a foretaste of it. The apostle therefore says to the Ephesians, *After that ye believed in Christ, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.*²⁶ This is a privilege of which it becomes us, as Christians, to seek for the enjoyment. To be *sealed with the Spirit*, and to *have the first fruits of the Spirit*, is the same thing as the apostle speaks of under other images, as having *the Spirit of God dwelling in*²⁷ us, being *led by the Spirit of God*, and *through the Spirit mortifying the deeds of the body*, and having *received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.*²⁸ Those who *have the first*

²⁶ Eph. i. 13, 14. ²⁷ 1 Cor. iii. 16. ²⁸ Rom. viii. 13—15.

fruits of the Spirit are they who produce the *fruit of the Spirit*, which is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;²⁹ or more particularly, the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance.³⁰ These persons manifest, not only by their profession, but by their life and conduct, that they have not received the grace of God in vain; but that it does teach them *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*³¹ These *fruits of the Spirit* are the first fruits of a glorious harvest of blessedness, which believers in Christ shall reap in the kingdom of God in heaven. And it is by the production of these *fruits of the Spirit*, that they give evidence to the world that they are indeed the children of God. For *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*³² Let it be our earnest prayer that these *fruits of the Spirit* may be produced by us, to the glory of God, and the consolation and peace of our souls.

But it is said of those who *have the first fruits*

²⁹ Eph. v. 9. ³⁰ Gal. v. 22, 23. ³¹ Titus ii. 12—14. ³² Rom. viii. 9.

of the Spirit,—even we ourselves groan within ourselves. So the apostle says to the Corinthians, *We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.*³³ Although the sins of believers in Christ are forgiven them for His name's sake, yet as long as they carry about with them a body of sin and death, it will give them continual occasions of disquietude and uneasiness, and of *groanings which cannot be uttered,*³⁴ which are not loud but deep, not heard by their fellow creatures, but which enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and occasion the exercise of His pity and compassion. How the apostle Paul groaned, we find from his saying, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* and making the humiliating confession, *I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*³⁴ The Christian's grief arises from a very different cause from that of the worldling. He may be afflicted in his outward circumstances, and deeply pained by them; but in these respects he can resign himself to the will of God, and pray that bodily diseases, or worldly losses or privations, may be sanctified to him. He regards these things as what he may expect to meet with in this world, because of his having been *shapen in*

³³ 2 Corinthians v. 4.³⁴ Romans viii. 26; vii. 24, 23.

*iniquity and conceived in sin,*³⁵ and in many things offending through the weakness of the flesh. He considers that suffering is his desert as a sinner against God. That which causes him to groan in reality, is the corruption of his nature. It grieves him that he is so prone to do that which is displeasing to God. It grieves him that the love of Christ does not constrain him as it ought to do; that it does not so fill his heart with gratitude and praise, as to actuate him in every thought, word, and action of his life. It is his desire, his prayer, and his endeavour, that this may be the case; yet he cannot but be conscious of much infirmity in the midst of it. As, however, it is his aim to *abound more and more* in that which is pleasing to God; he is enabled, in some measure, to *bring forth fruit unto God*³⁶ in his life and conduct, and to *adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour*; his hopes and desires being chiefly directed to things unseen and eternal; as the apostle describes him in the text, in the

Third place, Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. This is the habitual frame of his mind with regard to futurity. He patiently waits *all the days of his appointed time* on earth *till his change come,*³⁷ *earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with his house, which is from heaven, that mortality may be swallowed up of life,*³⁸

³⁵ Psalm li. 5. ³⁶ Rom. vii. 4. ³⁷ Job xiv. 14. ³⁸ 2 Cor. v. 2, 4.

whenever he shall be called to leave this perishing world. The manner in which he waits for this event, is shown in the verse that follows the text. His hopes are directed to things unseen. He seeks for the aid of the Holy Spirit, to succour him in his weakness, and to enable him to continue instant in prayer; and considering the blessings of which he has been made a partaker, he depends upon the fulfilment of the promise of his heavenly Father, that *He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will with Him also freely give us all things*; and therefore *no creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*³⁹ At times therefore he cannot but be desirous of being beyond the reach of trials and temptations; he cannot but have *a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.*⁴⁰ For then he will receive *the adoption*; then all the blessings which flow from being adopted into the family of God, will be his eternal portion. The first fruits or foretaste of this he enjoys now; as the apostle John said, *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*⁴¹ Then he

³⁹ Rom. viii. 32, 39. ⁴⁰ Phil. i. 23. ⁴¹ 1 John iii. 1, 2.

will enjoy blessedness in perfection, and without end. Then he will partake of *the redemption of the body*. His body, which was *sown in corruption*, will be *raised in incorruption*; which was *sown in dishonour*, will be *raised in glory*; which was *sown in weakness*, will be *raised in power*; which was *sown a natural body*, will be *raised a spiritual body*.⁴² What a blessed hope is this! to be enabled to look forward in the manner in which it is the privilege of believers in Christ to do, and to be *waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*, when body and soul will be re-united, and *we shall ever be with the Lord*,⁴³ having *an entrance ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.⁴⁴ May we be numbered among those who shall be made partakers of this blessedness, when we have done with all things here below. Let us live in hope of it, living above the world; living *the life which we now live in the flesh, by the faith of the Son of God*,⁴⁵ and praying that the *God of peace may sanctify us wholly*; and *that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*,⁴⁵ to receive us to Himself in the mansions of everlasting bliss.

⁴²1 Cor. xv. 42-44. ⁴³1 Thess. iv. 17; v. 23. ⁴⁴2 Pet. i. 11. ⁴⁵Gal. ii. 20.

SERMON XL.

FOR THE

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

SANCTIFICATION.

1 Peter iii. 15.

BUT SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD IN YOUR
HEARTS.

TRUE religion denotes the restoration of fallen man to the favour of God, bringing him back from the error of his ways, and binding him again as it were under the obligations which he owes to his Creator. All religions but the Christian fail of attaining this object. Divine revelation alone informs us of the real state of mankind in consequence of sin; shows us our utter alienation of mind and estrangement from God, our total corruption and depravity; and points out in Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and Mediator, a full and complete remedy; whereby our sin may be pardoned, and we may be recon-

ciled to God, restored to His favour, enjoy His protection and blessing here on earth, *and rejoice in hope of the glory of God* hereafter. True religion, wherever it exists, has its commencement in the heart. It is first an internal principle. According to the language of the text, the Lord God is sanctified in the heart in the first instance. He is regarded as the object of supreme affection. And then its influence appears in the life and conduct, which is conformed to the revealed will of Him whose supremacy is acknowledged and desired. The religion of Christ shows us also where help may be obtained, to enable a fallen creature to live and walk according to the will of God, by making known the Holy Spirit as the Teacher and Sanctifier of all those who seek for the pardon of their sins past, and for reconciliation with God, through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus. By His gracious influence they are enabled to resist Satan, to strive against sin, and to overcome the world.

The exhortation which concludes the Epistle for this day, is quoted by the apostle in part from the prophecy of Isaiah, where the prophet admonishes the ancient people of God, *Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread; and He shall be for a sanctuary.*⁴⁶ The object proposed by the prophet's exhortation, is similar to that of the apostle; the removal of the fear of man by

means of the heart being possessed with the fear of God. The words before us may lead us to inquire,

First, Who it is that we are to sanctify;

Secondly, Where or how we are to sanctify Him; and

Thirdly, The manner in which He is to be sanctified, or wherein this sanctification consists.

May the Spirit of God be pleased to apply this exhortation of His holy word to our minds and consciences, that we may be led to comply with it, to the glory of God and our own happiness and consolation. We are to consider,

First, Who it is that we are to sanctify. The text says, *Sanctify the Lord God*. The person whom we are commanded to sanctify, is the gracious Being who bears the *glorious and fearful name, the Lord our God*,⁴⁷ and who is *the Lord of hosts Himself*,⁴⁸ the God of the armies of heaven and of the inhabitants of the earth. He is no other than our Creator, our Governor, and our Benefactor; the self-existent Being to whom we owe ourselves and all that we have and are, to whom we are indebted for life and every comfort we enjoy. As Jehovah, the only self-existent Being, and the Author of all existence, of all life and motion in the creatures of His power, whether rational or animal, He is the proper object

⁴⁶ Isaiah viii. 13. ⁴⁷ Deut. xxviii. 58. ⁴⁸ Jer. x. 6, 7, 10, 12, 16.

of our worship and adoration. As our God, a term which denotes His covenant relationship with fallen man, He is the proper object of our gratitude and praise. When we think of His greatness and our insignificance, of His goodness and our unworthiness, we should fear and reverence Him as Jehovah, the great King of heaven and earth; and we should love and serve Him as our God, for the grace which He has manifested to His rebellious creatures. The prophet Jeremiah addresses Him, *Forasmuch as there is none like unto Thee, O Lord, Thou art great, and Thy name is great in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations; for to Thee doth fear appertain, forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto Thee. The Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting King; at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation. He hath made the earth by His power; He hath established the world by His wisdom; and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion. He is the Former of all things; the Lord of hosts is His name.*⁴⁸ This is the great and glorious Being whom we are commanded to sanctify. Surely it must be the interest and the happiness of His creatures to reverence and fear His holy name with the deepest awe, and the most humble obedience to His supreme authority. Let us consider who He is,

and what He is, that we may be in some measure sensible of the greatness of our obligations to Him, and may be disposed to comply with the exhortations of His holy word. The

Second point to be noticed is, Where or how we are to *sanctify the Lord God*: and that is, *in our hearts. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.* The obedience of the heart is the obedience of love. We are here called upon to give up or devote our best affections to the Lord our God, that we may love Him above all things. The heart of man is naturally set upon any thing else whatever, rather than upon the love of God. The things of time and sense, the visible objects of this present evil world, are those upon which we are disposed to set our hearts, rather than on things unseen and eternal. The invisible God is however the object best deserving of our supreme regard and affection, for to Him we are under the deepest possible obligations for every blessing and comfort that we partake of. He alone is worthy of our love, as from Him alone we can be assured of receiving a full recompence for it. How often the love of the creature meets with a base return. How many are disposed to turn away from our love, when we might be willing to confer it upon them. But he who sanctifies the Lord God in his heart, may be satisfied that his affections will not be thrown away or lost upon the object to which he has devoted them;

but that *a full reward shall be given*⁴⁹ to him by that gracious Being to whom he has surrendered his heart, to love Him above all things. As our Saviour said to His disciples, *He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*⁵⁰ What a blessed return is this for giving up our hearts to God, to love and serve and glorify Him as we ought to do; as it is our bounden duty and our reasonable service.

Let us ask ourselves, Upon what are our hearts fixed? Are they set upon this worthy object of our best affections, which will afford us a full recompence for our love? It is evident that the God of heaven is not the object of supreme affection to the multitude of mankind. They love Him not. *They say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.*⁵¹ He is truly loved by those only who know Him as their God, reconciled to them in Christ Jesus, sustaining a covenant relationship towards them for His sake. Do we thus know Him as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus? If so, *we shall love Him, because He first loved us,*⁵² and shall pray that we may be enabled to love Him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength; that every faculty of our bodies and souls may be devoted to His service, and He may be glorified in us

⁴⁹ Ruth ii. 12. ⁵⁰ John xiv. 21, 23. ⁵¹ Job xxi. 14. ⁵² 1 John iv. 19.

and by us. He calls upon us, *My son, give Me thine heart.*⁵³ May we, through grace, obey the call, that He may reign in us, in our hearts, and we may show forth all His praise in our life and conduct. Unless *the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost being given unto us,*⁵⁴ our hearts will not be given up to Him; our lives will not be devoted to His honour and praise. But if the influence of the love of Christ be felt in our hearts, it will sweetly and powerfully constrain us to live to His glory. The

Third point to be considered is, The manner in which the Lord God is to be sanctified; or, wherein this sanctification consists. This is set before us in the Epistle for this day. From which we learn in general, that this sanctification consists in the fear of God superseding every other fear; the consequence of which is, that the conduct is regulated according to the will of God. Christians are therefore exhorted, *Be ye all of one mind;* or, as St. Paul has explained the subject, *Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.*⁵⁵ Those who make divisions in the church of Christ, and endeavour to split it into parties, act in a manner

⁵³ Prov. xxiii. 26. ⁵⁴ Rom. v. 5. ⁵⁵ 1 Cor. i. 10; xii. 26.

very inconsistent with a profession of Christianity. The religion of Christ inculcates unanimity and peace; not indeed to the sacrifice of Christian principle, but as the spirit of Christianity.

Christians are to cultivate union, not to encourage separation or discord. Their union of spirit is to be manifest in *having compassion one of another*, or by sympathising with each other in their mutual infirmities, as well as in their afflictions and trials. They are not to magnify each other's faults, but to consider rather their points of agreement than of difference; to *bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*.⁵⁶ And especially under the afflictions to which we are all liable as fallen creatures, it is the duty of the children of God to sympathise one with another; to show, as they may have it in their power, that when *one member* of the body of Christ *suffers, all the members suffer with it*.⁵⁷ In this they imitate the example of our blessed Redeemer, not only as it was exhibited in the days of His flesh, but as we are assured it is manifested by Him now that He is passed into the heavens. *For we have not a High Priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, but one *who can have compassion*⁵⁸ upon the poor and needy, who seek His sympathy in the time of their distress; and will manifest it

⁵⁶ Gal. vi. 2. ⁵⁷ Heb. iv. 15; v. 2. ⁵⁸ 1 John iv. 10, 11; iii. 14.

when they make their humble supplication at His footstool, for His mercy and grace to be vouchsafed to their souls. Those who feel their need of the Saviour's compassion, and apply for it, will necessarily sympathise with the suffering members of His mystical body, or with their Christian brethren, in their afflictions.

And not only so, but they will *love as brethren*. The primitive Christian church was peculiarly eminent for this brotherly love, which was continually inculcated by the apostles of Christ. As far as true Christianity flourishes in the hearts of its professors, this disposition will be cultivated and prevail. The apostle John inculcates it from the example of God Himself. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*⁵⁸

Christians are also to *be pitiful*, or full of pity; to have bowels of tenderness towards each other, like those of a parent towards his offspring. Such kindness they should cultivate and display towards each other, as children of the same heavenly Father. They are to *be courteous*, or friendly; to have friendly minds and kind dispositions one toward another, and to manifest this in their outward demeanour, while they feel it affecting them in the spirit of their minds. The apostle heaps one expression upon another to

inculcate the benevolence which is to be felt and manifested by believers in the Lord Jesus Christ towards each other. They are to *do good unto all men, but especially unto them that are of the household of faith.*⁵⁹

And not only are these good qualities to appear in their intercourse one with another; but the opposite evil dispositions are to be mortified and renounced. *Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing.* This is what mankind are naturally prone to do. There are many who would not do an injury to others of their own accord; who would, notwithstanding, think it not unbecoming to retaliate when they have been injured. Not to resent an affront is, indeed, esteemed in the world to indicate a meanness of spirit. True Christianity will therefore be always reckoned pusillanimity by the children of this world. He, however, who holds on the even tenour of his way, notwithstanding he may meet with injurious treatment and reproachful language, is the true Christian hero; who, while he is not insensible to the indignity that is offered to him, instead of resenting it, remembers his Lord's command, *Bless them that curse you,*⁶⁰ *bless and curse not.*⁶¹ *Pray for them that despitefully use you.*⁶⁰ And so it is here said, *But contrariwise blessing, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that*

⁵⁹ Galatians vi. 10. ⁶⁰ Luke vi. 28. ⁶¹ Romans xii. 14.

ye should inherit a blessing. The reason is given why Christians should act in a different manner from the people of the world. *They are called to inherit a blessing.* It is their high privilege to look forward to eternal blessedness as their portion, when they have done with this world and its concerns; and they are therefore to live as becometh the expectants of a glorious immortality; they are to look beyond the things of time and sense, to the glory which shall be revealed in them; they are to look upwards to God and heaven, and to have their conversation as the heirs of God and of blessedness ought to do. What a blessed hope is this, which the believer in Christ is permitted to indulge, that he shall *inherit a blessing.* Oh! that our hearts were more set-upon the heavenly inheritance, which is reserved for the children of God, which He hath prepared for them that wait for Him. The more our minds and affections are directed to it, the more happy shall we be, and the less disquieted by the passing events of this present evil world.

The apostle quotes a passage from the thirty-fourth Psalm, for the purpose of enforcing his exhortation. *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers; but the face*

of the Lord is against them that do evil. Here we may observe the authority which the apostle ascribed to the holy scriptures of the Old Testament, by adducing them in proof of the propriety of the exhortations which he had given, and for the purpose of enforcing them. This passage shows us the manner in which it becomes Christians to act under injuries. They are to remember that the eyes of the Lord are upon them, and that He is the Hearer of the humble supplications of His people who call upon Him. They are therefore to cast all their care or anxiety upon the Lord, under the persuasion that He careth for them, and that His "overruling Providence ordereth all things, both in heaven and earth." In like manner as David acted, when he was cursed by Shimei. He said, *It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction; and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*⁶² The Christian is to recollect that the Lord's ears are open unto his prayers; and therefore he is to open the fulness of his heart before God; *in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to let his requests be made known unto God.* And thus, making known his troubles and complaints to his almighty and most merciful Father, pouring out his heart before Him, and making Him his refuge, his mind will be relieved from the burden which would otherwise oppress him. What a relief is it, in trouble of

mind, body, or estate, to have a God to go to, who heareth and answereth the prayers of His people that call upon Him. Our Saviour asks, *Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?* and replies, *He will avenge them speedily.*⁶³ He declares, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.*⁶⁴ And respecting His people He asserts, *He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of His eye,*⁶⁵ that part which is most sensitive, and of which the greatest care is taken. For this reason our apostle exhorts, in the following chapter, *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him, in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* Let them not distress themselves on account of the afflictions which they may be called to endure for Christ's sake, but let them take occasion to commit themselves and all their concerns into the hands of their heavenly Father, who will protect them from all evil, and will cause all things to work together for their good, and for His own glory.

In order to show the good will which a compliance with the exhortations that he had given would produce in the minds of people in general, the apostle asks, *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* or, as it might be rendered, if ye be imitators of Him

⁶² 2 Sam. xvi. 12. ⁶³ Luke xviii. 7, 8. ⁶⁴ Rom. xii. 19. ⁶⁵ Zech. ii. 8.

who is good. If you act as *the children of your heavenly Father, who is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil,*⁶⁶ your conduct will gain the good will of many; so that they will not be disposed to injure those whom they observe to be so harmless, and inoffensive, and benevolent. But if this should not be the case in some instances, *If ye even suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye.* It may well be an occasion of rejoicing, that your conformity to the image of God should make you an object of hatred to the ungodly. *Be not therefore afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.* Consider that those who oppose you are frail dying creatures, who are about *to fall into the hands of the living God;*⁶⁷ and therefore they are in a state truly pitiable; which should make them rather objects of your compassion, than of your ill will; for they shall be called to give an account of their conduct *to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*⁶⁸ Fear them not therefore. Dread not the displeasure of mortal men, *but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread;* and that will effectually remove all fear of man. Did we thus realize the Divine presence continually; did we consider ourselves as in His sight whose eyes are actually upon us, recollecting who He is, how much we are in-

⁶⁶ Luke vi. 35. ⁶⁷ Heb. x. 31. ⁶⁸ 1 Peter iv. 5. ⁶⁹ Psalm xix. 14.

debted to Him, and our accountableness to Him hereafter; considering the blessedness which He has promised to bestow upon His children, and the dreadful punishment which He will inflict upon His enemies; this would be a great means, under His blessing, of making us indifferent as to the applause or the opposition of our fellow-creatures; and anxious only to please Him well in all things, not only in our outward demeanour, but in the spirit of our minds; that *the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts*, may be acceptable in His sight, who is the Lord, our strength and our Redeemer,⁶⁹ our strength for the performance of what He enjoins us to observe; our Redeemer, to pardon our short comings of what He requires at our hands, and all the iniquity of our holy things.

We may see then the importance of *sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts*, or of having our best affections devoted to His service. The love of Him will make us happy under all circumstances. It will excite us to fulfil our duty in every station of life, *as to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord we shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for we serve the Lord Christ*,⁷⁰ a blessed Master, who will not fail, nor forsake them that trust in Him; but will bless them both in their bodies and in their souls, both here and hereafter. It will arm us against the fear of death; for it will assure us that in life

and in death *Christ is our gain*.⁷¹ It will lead us to look forward to eternity, not only without dismay, but with joy; *knowing that when we are absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord*,⁷² we shall depart to be with Christ, which is far better⁷¹ by much than any earthly felicity.

Let us then seek Divine grace to enable us to give up our hearts to the Lord, that He may be sanctified in them; that we may love Him supremely, that we may fear His displeasure above all things, fear to offend Him, dread to do what He has forbidden, or to omit what He has commanded us to observe and do. And may it be manifest in our whole conduct in life, that our hearts are sanctified to the Lord God, that it is our aim to please Him, and to live in unreserved obedience to His holy will and commandments, to honour His holy name and His word, and to serve Him truly all the days of our lives. Let us remember that the worship of the heart is the only worship which is acceptable to God; and that unless our hearts be truly given up to Him, to love Him above all things, we shall not willingly obey Him. But if He be sanctified in our hearts, His service will be perfect freedom; and we shall be enabled to look forward with a good hope of being admitted to serve Him in His presence, and to rejoice in His salvation for evermore.

⁷⁰ Col. iii. 24.

⁷¹ Phil. i. 21, 23.

⁷² 2 Cor. v. 8.

SERMON XLI.

FOR THE

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Romans vi. 11.

LIKEWISE RECKON YE ALSO YOURSELVES TO
BE DEAD INDEED UNTO SIN, BUT ALIVE
UNTO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR
LORD.

EVERY verse of the portion of scripture which is appointed as the Epistle for this day, is full of the most interesting and important instruction. It commences with bringing to our minds our baptismal obligations, and leading us to reflect on the privileges that we are called to enjoy as Christians, and the hopes which are set before us beyond this perishing world. *Know ye not, says the apostle, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by bap-*

tism into death ; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Those who have partaken of the ordinance of Christian baptism, thereby made a profession of faith in the death of Christ, and were pledged to a conformity to Him in His death, that they should become dead to sin and to the world ; and to a conformity to Him also in His resurrection, by walking in newness of life, as new creatures in Christ Jesus. Those who are baptized into the faith of Christ, profess to hope for pardon through His blood. This is the great privilege of the Christian church. We are all *by nature the children of wrath,*⁷³ the corrupt offspring of sinful parents, *shapen in iniquity, conceived in sin ;*⁷⁴ and therefore, unless we be cleansed from our natural pollution ; unless we *be born of water and of the Spirit,* we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.⁷⁵ Baptism is the outward means appointed to be used in token of the reception of this benefit ; and those who have been admitted by baptism into the church of Christ, profess to be partakers of it. By the use of the outward and visible sign, their need of being cleansed from their natural defilement is declared ; and thereby they are devoted to the service of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be the

⁷³ Eph. ii. 3.⁷⁴ Psalm li. 5.⁷⁵ John iii. 5.

children of God by adoption into His family, to be conformed to His holy image here upon earth, and to be partakers of His glory hereafter. This was the profession made in our names at our baptism. The dominion of Satan, the world, and sin, were then renounced either by our own act, or on our behalf; and we were dedicated to the service of God; that we might be His both here on earth and hereafter in heaven.

But something more than this seems to be meant by the apostle's addition, *Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death*. It denotes the entire change which takes place in believers in Christ. They are to consider themselves, as it were, dead and buried with regard to what they naturally loved and desired. As the apostle says to the Corinthians, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new; and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.*⁷⁶ By baptism, believers in Christ are buried with Him in death to sin; and therefore it is asked, *How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* They are also *dead to the law by the body of Christ,*⁷⁷ so as not to seek for justification before God by an imperfect obedience to its requirements; though they *delight in the law of God after the inward man,*⁷⁷ and

⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians v. 17, 18.

⁷⁷ Romans vii. 4, 22.

seek grace to enable them to live in obedience to it in all their conduct, *that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*⁷⁸ They are likewise *dead to the world*, so as not to seek their happiness in its perishing enjoyments. They consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims on earth, who *have here no continuing city*; and are therefore seeking *one to come*,⁷⁹ and desirous to *set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*⁸⁰ Believers in Christ are thus *buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so they also should walk in newness of life.* They are to be conformed to Christ in His resurrection as well as in His death, to *walk in newness of life*, to live as new creatures in Christ Jesus; or, as the apostle exhorts the Ephesians, to *put off concerning their former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of their mind; and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.*⁸¹

The apostle proceeds to show that this change of heart and life is essential to a true profession of Christianity. *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.* If we are partakers

⁷⁸ Titus ii. 10. ⁷⁹ Heb. xiii. 14. ⁸⁰ Col. iii. 2. ⁸¹ Eph. iv. 22—24.

of the blessings of which baptism is the sacramental sign, we shall partake of spiritual life, we shall walk with God as our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, we shall live under the influence of His Holy Spirit, and our conduct will be conformed to His holy will and commandments. As the apostle declared to the Galatians, *The life which we now live in the flesh, we shall live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.*⁸² We shall live above the world, having *our conversation in heaven,*⁸³ seeking those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.⁸⁴ If we are Christians indeed, we shall give evidence to all around us of the change of heart which has taken place in us, by our conduct being such as *becometh the gospel of Christ.*⁸⁵ *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* Here the manner of the death of Christ is referred to, for the purpose of showing that the believer in Christ is engaged, by his profession, to mortify his earthly members; to deny himself in every thing that is contrary to the will of his heavenly Father, as it is revealed in the word of God; to *crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts.*⁸⁶ His corrupt affections are to be put to a lingering death; they are to be continually re-

⁸² Gal. ii. 20; v. 24. ⁸³ Phil. iii. 20; i. 27. ⁸⁴ Col. iii. 1.

strained from breaking out in opposition to the will of God, and to the disgrace of his holy profession. He is not to *serve sin*, as the people of the world do, but in all things to approve himself as the servant of God, doing His will from the heart. Divine grace is needful to enable us to do this; but this *grace to help in time of need*,⁸⁵ will ever be vouchsafed in answer to the humble supplications of the children of God. They shall not be sent empty away, when they implore it at His footstool. *For he that is dead is freed from sin.* This is true both naturally and spiritually. A dead body no longer commits sin. So he that is *buried with Christ by baptism into death*, is freed from the dominion of sin. As the apostle says to such persons in this chapter, *Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*⁸⁶

This consideration leads him to look forward to that blessed state, wherein the believer in Christ shall not only be freed from the dominion of sin, but from its very being, when sin shall trouble him no more for ever. He says, *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.* It is the privilege of believers in Christ to look forward beyond this sinful dying world, with a good hope that they shall be admitted to partake of eternal life and blessedness

⁸⁵ Hebrews iv. 16.⁸⁶ Romans vi. 14.

when they have done with all things here below. This hope that *when Christ, who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory*,⁸⁷ animates them to *run with patience the race that is set before*⁸⁸ them, and to deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow Him, mortifying the whole body of sin. *Knowing this, that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him.* Our Lord Jesus Christ having been raised from the dead and gone into heaven, ever liveth. This is the consolation of His people. His resurrection is a pledge of theirs. He rose as *the first fruits of them that slept*,⁸⁹ the earnest of a joyful harvest. The dying believer in Christ may therefore commit his spirit into the hands of his faithful Saviour; not doubting but that He will take charge of it; that it will *depart to be with Christ*; that when it shall quit its earthly tenement, it will *be present with the Lord*.⁹⁰ And that although *death* may have the *dominion over his mortal body*, yet the time will come when *all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life.* Then *this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality*; and *death shall be swallowed up in victory*.⁸⁹ Then the believer in

⁸⁷ Col. iii. 4. ⁸⁸ Heb. xii. 2. ⁸⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 20, 54. ⁹⁰ 2 Cor. v. 8.

Christ shall live with his Lord and Saviour for evermore, and never again be separated from His blissful presence. The deliverance of Christ from death and the grave, is a pledge to His believing people that death shall not have dominion over them for ever; but as surely as He lives, they shall live also, according to His gracious promise. He said of Himself to His beloved disciple, *I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*⁹¹ As He who ever liveth has *the keys of hell and of death*, He will deliver His people from their power, so that they shall not have dominion over them, or be able to exclude them from the kingdom of God.

The apostle mentions what it was that caused the death of Christ. *For in that He died, He died unto sin once.* Sin was the cause of His death. Not His own sin, but *for the transgression of His people was He stricken.* The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and made His soul an offering for sin; in consequence of which He poured out His soul unto death, He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.⁹² But He rose from the dead and lived again, because it was not possible for the Holy One of God to see corruption, or to be detained as a

⁹¹ Revelation i. 18.

⁹² Isaiah liii. 8, 6, 10, 12.

prisoner in the grave. *He was raised again for our justification, that we, being justified by faith, might have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,*⁹³ *who in that He liveth, liveth unto God; as the Mediator of the new covenant, as the High Priest over the house of God, who ever liveth to make intercession for them that come unto God by Him.*⁹⁴ Having made a complete atonement for sin, “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world,” He is gone into heaven to plead His propitiation before the throne of God, as the High Priest of His church, which He purchased with His own blood; *He liveth unto God* as their Advocate and Intercessor, that through Him their prayers and supplications, and their sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, may come up with acceptance before the mercy seat; and they may obtain from His grace those blessings which they need, to the relief of their necessity, and to the setting forth of His glory.

The apostle, having thus set before believers in Christ their obligations to Him, and the blessings of which they were made partakers by His grace, exhorts them in the text, *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* This is the Christian life, and blessed are they

⁹³ Romans iv. 25; v. 1.

⁹⁴ Hebrews vii. 25.

who live it. By this exhortation the apostle shows Christians how they may be happy at all times, by attending to two particulars. He brings home the subjects on which he had been dwelling to practical use, for their daily comfort. Let us then consider more particularly these two points, with prayer that, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we may enjoy the consolation which is to be derived from attending to the exhortation here given.

The connexion of this exhortation with the doctrine taught in the preceding verse, should not, however, be overlooked. *Likewise*, in like manner as Christ *died unto sin*, so also, *reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin*. Sin caused the death of Christ, and it should therefore ever be regarded as the cause of death. Sin and death should ever be considered as cause and effect; and the remembrance of sin having caused the death of Christ, should lead us to regard it with aversion and dread, so as not to be influenced by it in any degree; in like manner as a dead body is unaffected by any thing around it.

The *first* point to which the text calls our attention is, that believers in Christ are to reckon themselves *to be dead indeed unto sin*. This intimates to us, that as long as we are in the body, sin continually besets us. We are encompassed with a body of sin and death. Sin is ever at hand with its temptations to solicit our regard.

It presses upon us with its enticements. It presents to us that which is pleasing to our corrupt nature. The pleasures of sin overcome many. They find it so very agreeable to live in sin. There is something so delightful in sin to the carnal mind. *As when the woman saw that the forbidden tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat.*⁹⁵ So the gratification of the *lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*,⁹⁶ is so congenial to all the natural feelings of the corrupt heart of man, that when there is an opportunity afforded of satisfying them, or of *fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*,⁹⁷ the temptation is irresistible. The fascination is so great, that it overpowers all the faculties of the soul, and carries all before it, unless Divine grace prevent.

When sin presents itself to the believer in Christ, when he feels himself ready to be infatuated by it, and to fall in with its temptations, he is to remember that by his profession he is *dead unto sin*; that he has “renounced the devil and all his works, the pomps, and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh,” so that he is “not to follow nor be led by them.” And he is therefore to go to *the throne of grace, to implore grace to help in time of need*,⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Gen. iii. 6. ⁹⁶ 1 John iii. 16. ⁹⁷ Eph. ii. 3. ⁹⁸ Heb. iv. 6.

that Divine strength may be made perfect in his weakness; he is to reason with himself, *How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?* It is monstrous to think of *continuing in sin, that grace may abound.*⁹⁹ He is to consider the greatness of his obligations to his ever blessed Redeemer, *who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father;*¹ and therefore, as being *not his own*, but *bought with the price* of the most precious blood of the Lamb of God, he is to *glorify God in his body, and in his spirit, which are God's.*² It is proper thus to fortify the mind with arguments against complying with the solicitations which sin presents. This seems to be the object of the apostle's exhortation. If by our profession of Christianity we are *dead indeed unto sin*, we are not to regard it with favour, but are to resist and strive against it. We are to consider how displeasing to God sin is, and how hateful all the workers of iniquity are in His sight; for He is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity;*³ and therefore the transgressors of His law shall be destroyed, the wicked shall be cut off.

But we are not to think that if we fortify our minds with arguments against sin, that will be sufficient to preserve us from falling into its

⁹⁹ Rom. vi. 2, 1. ¹ Gal. i. 4. ² 1 Cor. vi. 20. ³ Hab. i. 13.

snare, or from being overcome by its temptations. If we trust to our own strength, we shall find that temptation to sin is too powerful for us to resist. But if under a sense of our utter weakness, and our liability to fall into sin, we seek help from God to enable us to resist it, as the enemy of our souls, as that which would deprive us of the favour of God and everlasting salvation, His grace will be found sufficient for us, to enable us effectually to oppose all its temptations.

Let us then learn to look upon sin continually in the same light as the common feelings of human nature lead us to look upon death. Then every thing that has a tendency to promote sin will be avoided and abhorred, as those things are which have a tendency to bring death upon the body. And let us remember that it is in consequence of sin that we must die, the body that has sinned must perish. Sin is so displeasing to God, that all sinners must taste of death. The body must moulder in the dust, because it is a vile, sinful body. And the soul that is not quickened from a death in trespasses and sins in this life, will have the bitterness of eternal death for its portion in the world to come. Let us ever consider death as a proof of the displeasure of God against sin, that we may learn to abhor and avoid that which is so hateful to God. The apostle exhorts believers in Christ,

Secondly, Reckon ye yourselves to be alive unto

God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the blessed state of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is *alive unto God*. He has been quickened from a state of death in trespasses and sins. His sins have been forgiven him, through faith in the redemption of Christ. *The blood of Christ* which *cleanseth from all sin*⁴ has been sprinkled upon his conscience, by which the guilt of his past offences has been removed. He is *blessed* as having his *transgression forgiven*, his *sin covered*, his *iniquity not imputed* to him. He has *confessed* his *transgressions unto the Lord*, who has *forgiven the iniquity of his sin*.⁵ And *being justified by faith*, he has *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*,⁶ so that he has *an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*, who is *the propitiation for our sins*.⁴ This being the case, he is to reckon himself to be *alive unto God* through Christ. His mind and conscience are to be satisfied that, as his reliance is placed on the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ for his pardon and reconciliation to God, and on His mediation and advocacy for His acceptance in the Divine presence, he is regarded by the God of heaven as His child; and it is therefore His privilege, under *the Spirit of adoption*, to cry, *Abba, Father*; ⁶ to look to Him whose kingdom ruleth over all as His re-

⁴ 1 John i. 7; ii. 1, 2. ⁵ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2, 5. ⁶ Rom. v. 1; viii. 15, 32.

conciled Father, who having *not spared His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*, will with *Him also freely give us all things*.⁶ It is of great importance to have this conviction abiding in our minds, that we are *alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*; or that if we place our dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon, righteousness, and eternal life, it is our privilege to seek for the continual enjoyment of communion with God, to maintain intercourse with Him in the spirit of our minds at all times. Or in other words, that we *are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*,⁷ whose high privilege it is to call upon God as our Father, and to believe that, *like as a father pitieth his children*,⁸ so He will manifest His mercy and compassion towards us in every time of our need, when we call upon Him for grace to help us.

If we *reckon ourselves to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*, we shall draw near with confidence to the throne of grace at all times. Being assured of our acceptance with God, we shall *pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks, which is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us*.⁹ We shall know that we have a Friend to apply to at all times, who is *a very present help in trouble*.⁸ We shall make Him our refuge, and rejoice in His

⁷ Gal. iii. 26. ⁸ Psalm ciii. 13; xlv. 1. ⁹ 1 Thess. v. 17, 18.

salvation. And we shall be enabled to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*¹⁰ hereafter; since our blessed Saviour has said to His believing people, *Because I live, ye shall live also.*¹¹

Let not the humble believer in Christ fear to comply with this exhortation of the apostle. Let him *reckon himself to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*, and let him therefore *yield himself unto God, as one that is alive from the dead, and his members as instruments of righteousness unto God*. Let him *with purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord*,¹² as his *hope* and his *portion in the land of the living*, as his *shield* and protector from all evil, as his *exceeding great reward* in time and in eternity. Oh! that we might all of us know the blessedness connected with being *alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*; that we might *walk humbly with our God* here upon earth, as our Father and our Friend, and look forward with a good hope of being admitted into His blissful presence for evermore; that we might live as the children of God on earth, who are *heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*, and shall be *glorified together*¹⁰ with Him in His eternal kingdom. That this blessedness may be ours, may God of His mercy grant for Christ's sake.

¹⁰ Rom. v. 2; viii. 17. ¹¹ John xiv. 19. ¹² Acts xi. 23.

SERMON XLII.

FOR THE

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE WAGES AND THE GIFT.

Romans vi. 23.

FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH; BUT THE
GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH
JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

THESE words point out to us the end of the course through life which every individual of the human race is pursuing; and the way in which all the children of men are walking to each respective termination. How different are the courses here marked out; how wide asunder their termination! Of the latter it is said, that between the one and the other *there is a great gulf fixed*, so that none can pass it for evermore. How important then is it that we should pursue that course which will lead us to the enjoyment of eternal life; that the bitterness of eternal death,

from which there is no deliverance, may not be our portion.

In the Epistle for this day, the apostle addresses the Christians at Rome as persons who had been sinners, and were still compassed with the weaknesses of their fallen nature. He says, *I speak after the manner of men, because of the infirmity of your flesh.* As long as we are in the body, we are compassed with infirmity; exposed to the assaults of our spiritual enemies; and liable to be overcome by them on account of our weakness, if we rely upon our own strength. But *Divine grace is sufficient for the children of God,* and *His strength is made perfect in their weakness,*¹³ when they call upon Him for help in the time of their need.

The apostle reminds the Romans of their former state, when they were unacquainted with the gospel of Christ: *Ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity, unto iniquity.* When they were in a state of iniquity, under the dominion of sin, they readily gave themselves up to the practice of what God had forbidden in His holy law. But a change had taken place in their religious character and profession; which required that they should no longer act in this manner. And therefore he exhorts them, *Even so yield your members servants to*

¹³ 2 Corinthians xii. 9.

righteousness, unto, or in a state of, holiness. They had become a holy people unto the Lord their God ; and therefore, instead of uncleanness and iniquity marking their conduct, they were to take the law of God for their directory, that they might live *in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of their life.*¹⁴ That this was not the state in which they had formerly been, the apostle repeats: *For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.* They were destitute of righteousness before God, as well as being unrighteous in the sight of men ; and therefore were excluded from *the kingdom of God, which the unrighteous shall not inherit.*¹⁵ He had spoken before of the righteousness of which they had been made partakers through Divine grace, *even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, who are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*¹⁶ Of this righteousness the servants of sin are destitute, they have no portion in it. They are not *acceptable to God*, and in many cases they are not *approved of men*;¹⁶ for the open transgressor of the law of God is condemned even by his fellow creatures.

The unprofitableness of a course of sin, or of being its servants or slaves, is next intimated by the question, *What fruit had ye then in those things*

¹⁴ Luke i. 75. ¹⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 9. ¹⁶ Rom. iii. 22, 24; xiv. 18.

whereof ye are now ashamed? No benefit, no real pleasure is derived from the practice of iniquity, notwithstanding it is so eagerly pursued by multitudes. Sin is a deceitful thing; it promises much, but performs little for those who commit it. It causes them perpetual disappointment and *vexation of spirit*.¹⁷ It brings shame and disgrace upon them also in many instances, to which they are in continual fear of being exposed. When the Christian thinks of the sins which he had committed in times past, he is heartily ashamed of them, and of himself, for having sought his happiness in that which is so polluting to the soul, and so displeasing to God. And when it is considered that *the end of those things is death*, that sin brought death into the world; and often occasions premature death to the body; and is assuredly the cause of eternal death; we may well be ashamed and afraid of that which is so tremendous in its consequences.

The state of the believer in Christ is then described. *But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.* The believer is made free, not from *the infirmity of the flesh*; this he will carry about with him as long as he is in the body; but he is set free from the dominion of sin; so that *sin shall not reign in his mortal*

¹⁷ Ecclesiastes ii. 26.

body, that he should obey it in the lusts thereof. He is at war with sin, and is enabled to obtain daily victory of it, *through Christ who strengtheneth him.*¹⁸ He is a servant of God, who *worships Him in spirit and in truth,*¹⁹ and seeks help from Him continually against the enemies of his soul. He is in a state of holiness; separated in heart and spirit from *the world that lieth in wickedness*, set apart to the service of God, to be *holy in all manner of conversation*, or in the whole course of his behaviour and conduct in life. And he bears fruit corresponding with this holy state, *the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*¹⁸ He serves Christ in *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and in these things is acceptable to God, and approved also of men.*²⁰ He has happiness in walking with God as his heavenly Father, such as the world cannot give; and which it cannot take away; *and the end* of the blessed and holy course which he is pursuing, will issue in *everlasting life*, when he has done with all things here below.

With these observations the apostle introduces the important declaration in the text, *The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Let us consider the import of these statements, with prayer that

¹⁸ Phil. iv. 13; i. 11. ¹⁹ John iv. 24. ²⁰ Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

by the blessing of the Spirit of God, we may have a right understanding of Divine truth, and may avoid the misery consequent upon sin, and obtain the eternal blessedness which will be the portion of the children of God.

The *first* declaration of the apostle in the text is, *The wages of sin is death*. Two questions naturally arise here, What is sin? and, What is death? To the first question an answer is given by the apostle John, when he says that *Sin is the transgression of the law*.²¹ God has been pleased to give to mankind His holy, just, and good law, to be a directory to us how we ought to walk so as to please Him. *Sin is the transgression of this law*. It is a breach of our duty towards God, and our duty towards our neighbour; and the former naturally leads to the latter. He who observes his duty towards his neighbour, is esteemed a good member of society; he who disregards it, so far as to break the laws which have been made for the benefit of the community, exposes himself to punishment from his fellow creatures for his disobedience. And he who is unmindful of his duty towards God, however useful and exemplary a member of society he may be in other respects, is liable to the just judgment of God. The chief characteristic of the ungodly is, *God is not in all his thoughts*.²²

²¹ 1 John iii. 4.

²² Psalm x. 4.

He has no supreme regard for the will of God. The love of God is not in his heart. He is not anxious to please God in all things, and above all others. Gratitude to God does not possess his soul; so that the command, *Thou shalt have none other gods but Me*, has no practical influence over him. This *first and great commandment of the law* is explained by our Saviour to mean, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*,²³ which denotes that every faculty of soul and body is to be engaged wholly and constantly in the service of our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. And surely it is reasonable that He *in whom we live and move and have our being*,²⁴ who is the Author of every comfort we enjoy, should be the object of our utmost affection, and our unreserved obedience. Sin is a refusal to love God, a refusal to obey Him. It is a disregard of His authority, a manifestation of ingratitude for His benefits. It is giving to inferior objects the love and devotion of heart which belong of right to God alone. This is the essence of sin. Its overt acts are idolatry, profaneness, and sabbath breaking, as exhibiting a disregard for the nature and attributes, the name and the worship of God; and all those evils with which the world is overrun, to the subversion of the peace and

²³ Matthew xxii. 37, 38.

²⁴ Acts xvii. 28.

good order of society. This is what is meant by sin. And in the various works of sin, how laboriously are the multitude of mankind employed; living as if there were no God, pursuing the objects of time and sense with the utmost ardour; using all their energies in *fulfilling the evil desires of the flesh and of the mind*;²⁵ forgetful of God, and unconcerned about their eternal happiness.

These persons are represented in the text as working for wages, or for what a labourer earns for his subsistence, the food which he must necessarily receive for his support in his work. *The wages* for which the sinner is working, and which he will receive as a matter of course, when he has *accomplished as a hireling his day*,²⁶ *is death*. Dreadful wages indeed! *The end of those things is death*. This is what he earns by his labour, this is what he is working for, and cannot fail of receiving. And what is death? Is it merely the separation of the soul from the body, so that the person whom we one day behold in life and health, in vigour of mind and body, the pleasant companion, the dear friend, the affectionate relative, becomes an inanimate mass of putrefaction, which we are compelled to move out of our sight, and consign to the silent tomb? The death of the body is the consequence of sin.

²⁵ Ephesians ii. 3.

²⁶ Job xiv. 6.

Because of sin all the children of men die. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*²⁷ But there is another death spoken of in the holy scriptures as *the wages of sin*, which is called, *the second death, everlasting destruction, everlasting punishment, shame and everlasting contempt, and eternal death*. This is the death which is indeed *the wages of sin*; and will be the portion of all who *know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*²⁸ It is described to us under the figure of a *lake which burneth with fire and brimstone,*²⁹ as a *place of torment* from which there is no release or escape for ever and ever; where *the wrath of God abideth on the children of disobedience; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*³⁰

Did we really believe that such an awful state hereafter will be the consequence of a life of sin here on earth, surely sin would be as hateful to us as death is alarming. Are there any among us who are living in the practice of sin? Let such consider the nature of the wages for which they are working. And if they would avoid receiving the wages, let them at once leave off the work. See how hateful sin is in the sight of God; for He *hateth all workers of iniquity*, and will *destroy them*; and turn from it, that it may not

²⁷ Rom. v. 12. ²⁸ 2 Thess. i. 8. ²⁹ Rev. xxi. 8. ³⁰ Mark ix. 44.

bring you to ruin. Turn to Him, who *calls sinners to repentance*,³¹ and implore His grace to pardon the guilt of your past offences, and to deliver you from the dominion of sin in future, that you may not receive its wages in eternity. Are there any among us living in the love of sin, while through the goodness of God they are restrained from the practice of it, by the circumstances in which they are placed? See what a viper you are nourishing in your breast, which, while you cherish it, is devouring your vitals. Oh! seek Divine grace to enable you to cast away what is so truly loathsome and so destructive; that *being made free from sin*, both from the love and the practice of it, you may *become servants to God*, and be delivered from that dreadful misery which will overwhelm *the ungodly and the sinner*³² in that dire abode where pardon and repentance are not to be found.

Blessed be God, His holy word points out a way of escape *from the wrath to come*,³³ even for sinners that deserve to endure it. This is spoken of in the text as *the gift of God*. The means whereby it is bestowed, is said to be *through Jesus Christ our Lord*. And the gift itself is called *eternal life*. Let us then turn our attention from the awful subject which we have been considering, to the pleasing one which is here set

31 Matt. ix. 13.

32 1 Peter iv. 18.

33 1 Thess. i. 10.

before us. And while we consider it, well may we say, *Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift*,³⁴ for the gift of His only begotten Son to be our Redeemer, and for the gift of eternal life by means of His redemption. The persons upon whom this *gift of God*, the free gift of His grace, as the word denotes, is bestowed, had been formerly, it appears, living in sin, in the transgression of the law of God, yielding their *members to uncleanness and to iniquity*, the servants of sin, destitute of righteousness before God. But they had, through Divine grace, been *made free from sin*, their *transgression* had been *forgiven*, their *sin covered*, their *iniquity not imputed*³⁵ to them; they had *become servants to God*, being endued with righteousness, whereby they were admitted into His sacred presence, and enabled to *serve Him acceptably with reverence and godly fear*.³⁶

The means whereby these blessings, and the gift particularly mentioned, are bestowed, is *through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Through faith in Him pardon is obtained, because in Him *we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded toward us*.³⁷ Through faith in Him sinners are admitted to the enjoyment of the favour of God, because *Christ is the end of*

³⁴ 2 Cor. ix. 15. ³⁵ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2. ³⁶ Heb. xii. 28. ³⁷ Eph. i. 7, 8.

*the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*³⁸ It is thus alone that transgressors of the law of God are *made free from sin, and become servants to God*, and are brought into a state of holiness, in which they are enabled to *yield their members to be servants to righteousness*, as His obedient children. *All mankind having sinned, and come short of the glory of God*, having forfeited heaven and eternal happiness by their iniquity; we must, every one of us, be *justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*³⁹ or we cannot be accepted in the Divine presence. The glorious gospel of the blessed God makes known to us that, *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*³⁹ *He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up*³⁸ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, to be *the propitiation for our sins,*³⁹ to endure that wrath which His holy law denounced against the transgression of it, that by the shedding of His precious blood remission might be granted to them that believe in His name; and that for His righteousness' sake they might be accepted with God, partake of His favour, and enjoy His blessing in time and in eternity. If we see that all the blessings we enjoy flow to us *through Jesus Christ our Lord,*

³⁸ Rom. x. 4; iii. 23, 24; viii. 32. ³⁹ 1 John iv. 9; ii. 2.

we cannot but love Him *who daily loadeth us with benefits, the God of our salvation*;⁴⁰ and study to manifest our love to Him in every possible manner by which His glory may be promoted. Let us seek to have the atoning blood of the Lamb of God applied to our consciences by faith, that we may be cleansed from all sin, *and the peace of God which passeth all understanding may keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*,⁴¹ that we may be strengthened with strength in our souls to *run with patience the race that is set before us*, and to *fight the good fight of faith*, and *lay hold on eternal life, whereunto we are called*.⁴² Thus we shall be enabled to go on our way *rejoicing in Christ Jesus*, and *rejoicing also in hope of the glory of God*, through faith in His name.

That we may attain to this unspeakable blessedness, is the great object to which the text directs our attention, when it says, *The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Eternal life is the great blessing here set before us; happiness which shall know no end; *an exceeding and eternal weight of glory; a crown of glory that fadeth not away; a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give unto all them that love His appearing*.⁴³ In these terms it is described to us in the word of God. Oh! that our desires and expectations were

⁴⁰ Psalm lxxviii. 19. ⁴¹ Phil. iv. 7. ⁴² 1 Tim. vi. 12. ⁴³ 2 Tim. iv. 8.

more directed to it; and that we looked more to our *faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him, and keep His commandments,*⁴⁴ *in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,*⁴⁵ and will perform of the riches of His grace to the humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. If our faith and hope be in Christ, we need not doubt of the gift of God being bestowed upon us; not for our merits, but for His mercies' sake. It is in order that we may be led to seek earnestly for this unspeakable blessedness to be vouchsafed to us, that the dreadful wages of sin are stated in the text. The path to eternal death is marked out plainly, that we may avoid it. The way to everlasting life is described, that we may walk in it, and find rest to our souls, peace here, and glory hereafter. Eternal death is the desert, the merit of sin. Eternal life is the free, unmerited gift of God; a free gift of free grace *through Jesus Christ our Lord*. The desert of man as a sinner, a transgressor of the holy, just, and good law of God, is eternal death. But God, our heavenly Father, of His infinite mercy and compassion to our fallen race, was pleased to provide a ransom, on account of which all who put their trust in it are delivered from the wrath to come, and made partakers of eternal life and salvation in His

⁴⁴ Deuteronomy vii. 9.⁴⁵ Titus i. 2.

everlasting glory. And this gift He bestows freely, through His beloved Son, upon the humble suppliants at His footstool. Let us earnestly and diligently seek for the blessing, and it will not be denied to us.

And as an assurance of our obtaining it, He will give us an earnest or pledge, whereby we may be satisfied in our minds that we shall be put in possession of the heavenly inheritance hereafter. The apostle speaks of believers in Christ as being *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance*;⁴⁶ and again he says, *God hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit is the Author of spiritual life in the soul, that life which consists in communion of spirit with the Father of spirits, and is an anticipation and foretaste of eternal life, and may be said to be its commencement here upon earth; for all who are made partakers of spiritual life in this world, and no others, shall partake of eternal life. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His; but, As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with their spirits that they are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; who shall be glorified together*⁴⁸ with Him, in His ever-

⁴⁶ Eph. i. 13, 14. ⁴⁷ 2 Cor. i. 22. ⁴⁸ Rom. viii. 9, 14, 16, 17.

lasting kingdom. Let it be our prayer that we may enjoy this life of God in our souls, that *our fellowship may be with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,*⁴⁹ by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit; that we may *live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit*; and *living the life which we now live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for*⁵⁰ us, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,⁵¹ may look forward in hope to that eternal life which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord; having in view those things unseen and eternal, which will be fully realised when faith shall be turned into sight, and hope into enjoyment; and the song of salvation to God and the Lamb will resound for ever and ever. That we may be numbered among those who shall partake of the blessedness of the redeemed around the throne of glory, may God of His infinite mercy grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour: To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One God, be ascribed all honour, glory, majesty, and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

⁴⁹ 1 John i. 3. ⁵⁰ Gal. v. 25; ii. 20. ⁵¹ Luke i. 6.

SERMON XLIII.

FOR THE

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

Romans viii. 16, 17.

THE SPIRIT ITSELF BEARETH WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT, THAT WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD: AND IF CHILDREN, THEN HEIRS; HEIRS OF GOD, AND JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST; IF SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM, THAT WE MAY BE ALSO GLORIFIED TOGETHER.

THE great distinction which subsists between the children of this world and the children of God is, that the former are entirely directed and governed by animal and earthly considerations to fulfil the natural *desires of the flesh and of the mind*; while the latter are influenced by the Spirit of God to *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*.⁵¹ As believers in the Lord

Jesus Christ have the same desires and inclinations by nature as others, the apostle thought it needful to point out, in the portion of scripture selected as the Epistle for this day, the duty of the Christian to deny himself, or to *mortify the members which are upon the earth*;⁵² and the means whereby he is enabled to carry this into effect; and also to specify the high privileges of which he is made a partaker through Divine grace.

He begins with observing, *Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.* We are debtors to the long-suffering goodness and mercy of God. How great is the debt of love and gratitude which we owe to Him *in whom we live and move and have our being; who giveth to all life and breath and all things; who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.* Let us consider our obligations to Him, that we may be led to praise and magnify His name, and to live in obedience to His righteous commands, as it is our bounden duty to do, and our reasonable service requires. We are naturally disposed *to live after the flesh*, because *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*,⁵³ and therefore is conformed to its own natural condition. *They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh.*⁵⁴ This is the state of all mankind by nature. The universal inquiry is, *What*

⁵¹ Matt. vi. 33, 31. ⁵² Col. iii. 5. ⁵³ John iii. 6. ⁵⁴ Rom. viii. 5, 7, 6.

*shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed?*⁵¹ And the natural disposition of mankind is to seek their own self-gratification in every respect. This may be counteracted in some degree by the restraints of education and the habits of society; but it is found universally that man, left to himself, thinks only of following the natural devices and desires of his own corrupt heart, or of his *carnal mind, which is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* This living *after the flesh*, or being *carnally minded, is death.*⁵² Those who are in this state are dead to God, *dead in trespasses and sins*, and are walking in the road to eternal death. Living *after the flesh* affords evident proof of this. Where *the works of the flesh* appear in the conduct, the heart cannot be right with God. Those who love Him will keep His commandments. This is the evidence which they must give of being His children. Such persons only are alive to God, and have a hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

It is therefore said, *If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* The Holy Spirit is given to believers in Christ for this purpose, that He may sanctify them wholly; that by His sacred influence upon their souls, they may be enabled to *mortify the deeds of the body, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts*, to resist its solicitations, to strive against

sin, and not to submit to its dominion. And they who implore His gracious influences for this purpose, *shall live*; they shall be enabled to withstand effectually the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and shall not be overcome by them, but shall obtain continual victory over them in the strength of the Lord, and by the power of His might. And they shall be enabled also to walk in His holy ways, and find them to be ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. And when they are called out of this dying world, being *absent from the body*, they shall be *present with the Lord*; they *shall live* with Him for evermore. This blessedness awaits them as the children of God; *for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*. Those who are led by the Spirit of God, follow His leading; they do not walk contrary to Him, but walk in the way which He has marked out for them in His blessed word. The holy scriptures were given by His inspiration, in order to be a directory to the people of God, how they ought to walk so as to please Him. To those therefore who *are led by the Spirit of God*, His word will be *a lamp to their feet, and a light to their path*,⁵⁵ that they may follow its directions, and find rest to their souls. All who thus follow the Lord wholly, are His children, and will be owned and acknowledged by Him as such, in the manner which is afterwards mentioned in the text.

The characteristics of the children of God are next stated, both negatively and positively. *Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* It is said that our Lord Jesus Christ came to deliver them, who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage.⁵⁵ This is a fear which is natural to mankind as sinners against God. From this *bondage to fear*, the children of God are delivered by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As He is the Saviour of sinners, they put their trust in Him; and doubt not that according to His promise to them that believe in His name, He will be the Saviour of their souls; that they *shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.*⁵⁷ But the *spirit of bondage to fear* may refer to the condemnation of the law, under which the transgressors of it are held; and respecting which the apostle says, *There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.* The sinner has the sentence of condemnation hanging over his head, and he has reason continually to fear lest it should be put in execution; since *it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*⁵⁶ It is the fear of this *judgment of God*, which will be according to truth,⁵⁸ which makes death appear formidable to those who are conscious of their

⁵⁵ Ps. cxix. 105. ⁵⁶ Heb. ii. 15; ix. 27. ⁵⁷ Isa. xlv. 17. ⁵⁸ Rom. ii. 2.

multiplied transgressions against the law of God. But from this *bondage to fear* the believer in Christ is delivered. As he is freed from condemnation, he does not regard death as *the king of terrors*,⁵⁹ but as a messenger sent to convey him home to his Father's house.

And as an earnest of the blessedness that awaits him, he has *received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*. This is the cry of the helpless babe for relief from distress, or for deliverance from evils which are felt or dreaded. When a child cries, *Father*, the bowels of the tender parent are moved towards his offspring, to ascertain his wants; and he at once hastens to supply that which is needed. Our Saviour makes use of this natural feeling of affection in parents, to encourage His disciples to rely upon the goodness and bounty of God towards them. *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.*⁶⁰ It is by *the Spirit of adoption*, or in consequence of receiving it, that we are led to call upon the God of heaven in this endearing character. So the apostle says to the Galatians, *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*⁶¹ And the consequence of this is, as it is stated in the text,

⁵⁹ Job xviii. 14.⁶⁰ Luke xi. 13.⁶¹ Gal. iv. 6.

The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. Here is,

First, A twofold testimony borne to the statement made, that believers in Christ are in reality the children of God.

Secondly, The future blessedness connected with this relationship: and

Thirdly, The condition in this world of those who are admitted into it; with which their future state is contrasted.

May the Spirit of God be pleased to apply His word to our hearts and consciences, that we may enjoy the consolations which are to be derived from the consideration of the subjects here brought before us. It is to be observed,

First, That a twofold testimony is borne in the text to the statement, that believers in Christ are the children of God: there is the testimony of the Spirit Himself, and that of our spirits. We may inquire in the first place respecting the testimony borne by our spirits, that is, in the minds of those who *are in Christ Jesus*. This must relate to a consciousness respecting the change which has taken place in the disposition of their minds, and the course of their conduct, from that which they formerly manifested. *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity*

*and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.*⁶² It is declared that, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new; and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.*⁶³ To be in Christ, is to be united to Him by the faith of the operation of God,⁶⁴ or to believe what is recorded in the word of God respecting Him and His great salvation. It is to believe that *the Son of God was manifested to take away our sins, and to destroy the works of the devil;*⁶⁵ *that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that by His obedience unto death, "He made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," whereby He magnified the law, and made it honourable; and therefore in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, and are reconciled to God by the death of His Son,*⁶⁶ *so that being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; and are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* This is the record of the word of God, to the truth of which the spirit of the believer in Christ bears testimony. He has ascertained that such is the record of Divine truth. He relies upon it therefore as the foundation of his hope towards God.

⁶² 2Cor. i. 12; v. 17, 18. ⁶³ Col. ii. 12. ⁶⁴ 1John iii. 5, 8. ⁶⁵ Rom. v. 10.

He looks up to the God of heaven as his reconciled Father, through the propitiation of His beloved Son ; he accounts himself one of the children of God through faith in his Redeemer ; not for any merit of his own, but solely and entirely for Christ's sake. He believes the record of the word of God, and he has *joy and peace in believing*. His spirit bears testimony that he is a child of God ; because the word of God has declared that those who believe in Christ are His children. He cannot but have a consciousness that he believes the record of the word of God on these important subjects.

His belief of the word of God is, however, not merely the result of his understanding being exercised, or his mind being informed by means of searching the holy scriptures ; and being convinced in his judgment of the reasonableness of the doctrines contained in them. He believes not merely from the impulse of his own mind, but in consequence of being influenced by the Spirit of God ; by whose operation faith is wrought in his heart, so that he receives the word of God with pure affection ; his heart is won to embrace the truths of the gospel ; he receives the truth in the love of it ; his whole soul is engaged in the service of God, and all that he has and is, is given up to Him, to *glorify God in his body and in his spirit, which are God's*. The Spirit of God applies the word of God to his heart and con-

science, so that the *gospel* comes *not unto him in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*⁶⁶ of its truth; and therefore his *faith* stands *not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*. He receives it *in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*;⁶⁷ so that the *word of God worketh effectually in*⁶⁸ him; and the *fruit of the Spirit, which is in all goodness and righteousness and truth*,⁶⁸ is produced by him, to the praise and glory of God. This is the evidence which is afforded of his partaking of Divine influence. Unless this *fruit of the Spirit* be produced in the life and conduct, there can be no evidence given of our being the children of God; for where it is not produced, the influence of the Spirit cannot be experienced. But “godly persons,” according to the language of the seventeenth Article of our church, “feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things:” and by this means *the Spirit Himself beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God*. By His grace He “fervently kindles their love towards God, and establishes and confirms their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ;” and enables them to abound in every good word and work. Let it be

⁶⁶ 1 Thess. i. 5; ii. 13. ⁶⁷ 1 Cor. ii. 5, 4. ⁶⁸ Eph. v. 9.

our earnest prayer that the Spirit of God would work in us to will and do that which is pleasing in His sight; *that we may be manifestly the children of our Father which is in heaven*; not only bearing the name of Christians, but serving the Lord Christ, and living in obedience to the holy will and commandments of our God. The apostle speaks in the text,

Secondly, Of the future blessedness connected with being numbered among the children of God. He says, *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*. The contemplation of the future blessedness of the children of God, led the apostle Peter, at the beginning of his first epistle to the churches of Christ, to exclaim, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time*. All the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, all who are born of the Spirit, are begotten to this inheritance. It is reserved for them, and therefore they shall assuredly be put in possession of it. And in order that they may not fail of obtaining it, they are kept by the power of God, which no enemy can effectually oppose. He has promised His people

that, *lest any hurt them*, He *will keep them night and day*.⁶⁹ For the exercise of this power on their behalf in the time of their need, they are to depend upon Him; they are to make Him their refuge by faith; and then they may be assured that no enemy shall prevail against them; but they shall receive the *inheritance which is reserved for them in heaven*. They are heirs of God; heirs according to the *promise of life which is in Christ Jesus*; ⁷⁰ *for this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life*.⁷¹ While the believer in Christ is in this world, he is like an heir during his minority; but when he shall have done with all things here below, his minority will come to an end; and he will be put in possession of his heavenly inheritance, which God has promised to give Him for Christ's sake. Of this *inheritance the Holy Spirit* is to him *the earnest*⁷² or pledge; so that as surely as he is made a partaker of the Divine influences of His grace here on earth, so surely shall he receive the blessing of *eternal life*, which is *the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

In order to show more fully what the blessedness is of which the *children of God* are *heirs*, they are said to be *joint heirs with Christ*. The blessedness which Christ is gone into heaven to partake of in human nature, shall be their por-

⁶⁹ Isa. xxvii. 3. ⁷⁰ 2 Tim. i. 1. ⁷¹ 1 John ii. 25. ⁷² Eph. i. 14; ii. 6.

tion. The apostle therefore speaks of believers in Christ, as being *raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*;⁷³ according to the promise of the risen and exalted Redeemer of mankind, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.*⁷⁴ In reference to which the apostle says to the Colossians, *When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.*⁷⁵ And the apostle Peter observes, *When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away.*⁷⁶ And St. John exclaims, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*⁷⁶ So our Saviour prayed to His Father just before His last sufferings, *Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me.*

Such is the representation given in the word of God of the future blessedness, which is reserved in heaven for the *joint heirs with Christ*. They are in consequence of it now said to be *partakers of the glory that shall be revealed*,⁷⁵ because of the certainty of the fulfilment of the promises of God hereafter to those who have

⁷³ Rev. iii. 21. ⁷⁴ Col. iii. 4. ⁷⁵ 1 Peter v. 4, 1. ⁷⁶ 1 John iii. 2.

believed through grace. Oh! that our hearts were more set upon these things *which are not seen and eternal*, instead of being so wholly absorbed as they are in those *which are seen and temporal*. Let us direct our expectations more to the future blessedness of the children of God; as *knowing that we are thereunto called, that we should inherit a blessing.*⁷⁷ Let us live in *hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began* to Christ, and the members of His mystical body; not doubting but that for His sake in whom we put our trust through His grace, *we shall be also glorified together with Him in His eternal kingdom*. This shall assuredly be the case with the *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*; they shall be put in possession of the heavenly inheritance which is reserved in heaven for them; *and so shall they ever be with the Lord.*⁷⁸ What inheritance is to be compared with this! How little do all earthly inheritances appear when put in comparison with it! What are estates, and titles, and thrones, in this world, in comparison with the inheritance reserved for the children of God! *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*⁷⁹ All that this world can give is fleeting and transitory. How often does it pass away from its possessor; and at best, it is certain that

77 1 Peter iii. 9. 78 1 Thess. iv. 17. 79 Eccles. i. 2.

he must quit his hold of it; and no one knows how soon he may be called away from his earthly possessions. But the *inheritance* of the children of God is *incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away*; it will never be taken away from them; and they will not be separated from it for ever. Let this be the object of our ardent pursuit; that we may be blessed for evermore. The apostle mentions,

Thirdly, The condition in this world of the children of God, with which he contrasts their future state. *If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.* The believer in Christ may expect to be a sufferer while he is in this world, to *suffer with Christ*, or for His sake; because, as our Saviour said of His disciples, *they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*⁸⁰ He Himself taught them to expect the opposition and enmity of the children of this world. *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*⁸¹ And He warned them that *men should revile them and persecute them*, and should *say all manner of evil against them falsely for His sake.*⁸² The opposition of the world to Him *who went about doing good*,⁸³ seems very extraordinary. But so it was. The people of

⁸⁰ John xvii. 16; xv. 19. ⁸¹ Matt. v. 11. ⁸² Acts x. 38; iii. 15; xiv. 22.

the world persecuted the Lord Jesus to death, they killed the *Prince of life*,⁸³ they crucified the *Lord of glory*; and they afterwards put to death His apostles. St. Paul said to Timothy, *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*; and at another time declared, *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*.⁸⁴ As far as the children of God come in contact with the people of the world, they may expect to find that they are called to *suffer with Christ*, or as He did. Let them return good for evil, blessing for cursing; not troubling themselves about *the sufferings of this present time*, which are not worthy to be compared with the *glory which shall be revealed in them*; ⁸⁵ but remembering that it is written, *If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him*, we shall be glorified together with Him in His everlasting kingdom. And as *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*,⁸⁴ we may well bear with it; following the example of Him, *who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously*. Let us cast all our care upon Him who careth for us; and believing, we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, in hope of receiving the end of our faith, even the everlasting salvation of our souls.⁸⁵

⁸³ Rom. viii. 16. ⁸⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 17. ⁸⁵ 1 Peter ii. 23; i. 8, 9.

SERMON XLIV.

FOR THE

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE DESIGN OF SCRIPTURE HISTORY.

I Corinthians x. 11, 12.

NOW ALL THESE THINGS HAPPENED UNTO THEM FOR ENSAMPLES: AND THEY ARE WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION, UPON WHOM THE ENDS OF THE WORLD ARE COME. WHEREFORE, LET HIM THAT THINKETH HE STANDETH TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL.

THE history contained in the holy scriptures of the Old Testament is exceedingly instructive. It was not written with the same design as other histories, merely for the purpose of recording past events, but chiefly in order to show the dealings of God with mankind as a pattern to all future ages of the world. Such is the statement of the text with regard to the account given of the journeying of the Israelites through the

wilderness to the land of Canaan. When therefore we take up the volume of Divine revelation, we should endeavour to obtain instruction from it in this point of view ; that seeing the manner in which God has acted toward His people in times past, we may learn to avoid their sins and errors on the one hand ; and on the other, may take encouragement to put our trust in the Lord God ; believing that He will bless us as He did His ancient people, when *with purpose of heart we cleave unto the Lord*. In considering the Epistle for this day, we may direct our attention,

First, To the privileges with which the Israelites were favoured ; and compare with them those which we enjoy.

Secondly, To their conduct in the wilderness, which is said particularly to be recorded for our admonition ; and

Thirdly, To the exhortation which the apostle enforces from the consideration of it.

May we be led by the teaching and blessing of the Spirit of God to value our privileges, and to make a right use of them ; and taking the warning here given to us, may we receive the word of exhortation, to the glory of God and our own happiness and salvation.

First, The privileges which the Israelites enjoyed, are enumerated by the apostle. He commences by saying, *Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were*

under the cloud, and all passed through the sea ; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Their being *under the cloud* denoted that during their journey through the wilderness, from the time of their leaving Egypt until their arrival in the land of Canaan, they had the benefit of Divine guidance and protection. So it is said in the sacred history : *The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them in the way ; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people.*⁸⁶ And again, *When the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed ; and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. Thus at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they rested.*⁸⁷ Another benefit which they derived from being *under the cloud*, was the protection it afforded them in the time of danger. When the Egyptians pursued after them to overtake them before they reached the Red Sea, *the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them ; and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel ; and it was a cloud and darkness to them ; but it gave light by night to these ; so that the*

⁸⁶ Exodus xiii. 21, 22 ; xiv. 19, 20. ⁸⁷ Numbers ix. 17, 18.

*one came not near the other all the night.*⁸⁶ Thus the Israelites, being *under the cloud*, were under the Divine guidance and protection. Their enemies were prevented from injuring them, and they were directed as to the way wherein they were to go. And if they had implicitly followed this guidance, they would have been led at once to the land which they were to have for their possession, instead of wandering forty years in the wilderness. But they were not satisfied to follow the leading of Divine Providence and to trust to His protection, notwithstanding the goodness of God which had been manifested to them. When they came to the borders of the land of promise, they refused to go up and take possession of it, notwithstanding the visible manifestation which they had of the Divine presence. As those who had been sent to search the land brought back an evil report, the people *said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt:*⁸⁸ or as Nehemiah observes, *They dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Thy commandments; and refused to obey, neither were mindful of the wonders that Thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage.*⁸⁹ What ingratitude was this for the goodness which had been shown to them. God was evidently going before them, to lead them in the way that they should go; and yet they would not follow His

guidance, notwithstanding they were assured that with His presence they had almighty protection.

It is next said, that they *all passed through the sea*. While they followed the cloud which directed them in their journey, they were carried in safety through the greatest dangers. Even an arm of the sea could not oppose a barrier to their progress; for *the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong wind, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.*⁸⁸ Thus they were protected from the power of their enemies, who pursued after them; and when they had passed through in safety, *the waters returned, and covered the chariots and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.*⁸⁹ When they had experienced this wonderful deliverance, they *sang praise* to Him who had thus manifested His almighty power on their behalf. But on the first reverse in their circumstances, the first inconvenience to which they were subjected, *they murmured in their tents*, and were again disobedient *unto the voice of the Lord*.

The object however for which the apostle

⁸⁸ Num. xiv. 4. ⁸⁹ Neh. ix. 16, 17. ⁹⁰ Exod. xiv. 21, 22, 28.

mentions that the Israelites, on leaving Egypt, *all passed through the sea*, seems to be that he might show that they had sacraments of the same description as those of the Christian church. He therefore speaks of their baptism in connexion with it; that they *were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea*. They were initiated into the Mosaic dispensation, and induced to comply with its ordinances, in consequence of the goodness of God being manifested to them on this occasion; His cloud being over them to guide and protect them, and *the waters being a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left*, while they went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, and passed in safety through its channel. It became them as the preserved and blessed people of God, who were so highly favoured by Him, to devote themselves to His service, to live in obedience to His laws. This baptism of the Israelites was an example or type of Christian baptism. As they were bound to be the servants of God, in consequence of having been *brought out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage*, and having been carried in safety under the Divine guidance through the Red Sea: so likewise the goodness and mercy of God in Christ Jesus should constrain us, who enjoy the benefits of the Christian dispensation, as those who are *not our own*, but *are bought with a price, to glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are God's*.²²

It becomes Christian parents, as those who have themselves been made partakers of the goodness and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, to present their children for baptism; that thus they may be outwardly devoted to the service of God, and laid under a formal obligation to be His servants in this world; to “renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; to believe all the articles of the Christian faith; and to keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life.” This indeed we are all of us bound to do, as the creatures of God. But it is important that the obligations we are under should be brought before our eyes continually; that we may be led, as those who have been devoted to the service of God, to live in humble obedience to Him; and may partake of His blessing, both in this life, and in that which is to come. As we have been baptized into the Christian faith, the vows of God are upon us. We have been devoted to the service of God in baptism. Are we then mindful of our baptismal engagements and obligations? If we are living in sin, doing the works of the devil, or what God has forbidden in His holy law, we are self-condemned; because we profess to have renounced the dominion of Satan, and yet are following his evil suggestions, and are therefore in reality living in subjection to his

authority. *His servants ye are*, said the apostle, *to whom ye obey*,⁹¹ *for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*⁹¹ And those who do the works of the devil shall not be accounted the servants of God, nor partake of His favour or blessing, notwithstanding they may make a profession of religion.

Let us beware of deceiving ourselves with having *a name to live*, while we are indeed dead to God; while we know Him not, have no fellowship, no communion, no intercourse with Him in the spirit of our minds; while we love Him not, and obey not His commandments. It is a privilege to have been baptized, to have been devoted to the service of God, but those only who are *washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*, will obtain His blessing hereafter; *for the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*⁹² And they deceive themselves who imagine that their outward privileges will ensure to them the favour of God, without the end being answered for which these privileges were granted. If then the works of the devil, or the love of the world, or the fulfilment of the sinful desires of the flesh mark our conduct, it is evident that we are none of His whose name we bear; but as we are living in disobedience to His authority, we can have no reason to expect that

⁹¹ Romans vi. 16; ii. 13.

⁹² 1 Corinthians vi. 11, 9, 20.

we shall not be disowned and rejected by Him in the great and terrible day of the Lord, when *God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*⁹³ Let us then consider seriously our baptismal obligations, and pray earnestly for Divine grace to enable us to fulfil them, that we may receive the benefits connected with them, both in this world and in eternity.

The apostle speaks further of the Israelites partaking of another sacrament besides that of baptism; one which corresponds with the Christian ordinance of the Lord's supper. He says, *They did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.* They ate of the manna which was given them from heaven day by day; and was a type or representation of *the living bread which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.*⁹⁴ They drank of the water which flowed from the smitten rock, which was a type of Christ smitten for the sins of the world; *wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, having the chastisement of our peace laid upon Him, that with His stripes we might be healed.*⁹⁵ We have the privilege of the Lord's supper being administered among us, in which we are called upon to com-

⁹³ Eccles. xii. 14. ⁹⁴ John vi. 51, 50. ⁹⁵ Isaiah liii. 5.

memorate the wonders of redeeming love; and to "feed on Christ in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving," while we partake of the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace which is signified by it. Do we with gratitude of heart receive these tokens of the love of Christ our Saviour to us sinful creatures? Or, do any who call themselves Christians refuse the spiritual food and the spiritual drink which is provided for the nourishment of our souls by faith in the redemption of Christ? If our bodies are not supplied with food, we die; and therefore we are taught to pray to our heavenly Father, *Give us this day our daily bread.* If our souls are not supplied with the spiritual food of "the body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper," they cannot be strengthened and refreshed, they cannot be alive to God. If the means of grace be despised or neglected, we must be destitute of the benefit which is to be derived from the use of them. It is in vain that we call ourselves Christians, if the ordinances which Christ enjoined upon His people for their observance be disregarded by us; for we can have no part or lot in His salvation. We may however partake of the outward ordinances without deriving spiritual benefit from them, if we rest in the external performance without seeking the promised blessing. Let us beware of de-

ceiving ourselves in these matters, either by disregarding, or by not using rightly, for a right end, the ordinances of the house of God. The Israelites are set before us as an example in this matter. It is said of them, that *with many of them God was not well pleased*; the proof of which was, *for they were overthrown in the wilderness*. And it is added, in language similar to the text, *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*. This observation of the apostle may lead us to consider,

Secondly, Their conduct in the wilderness, which is said in the text to have been *written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*. Notwithstanding the goodness of God was manifested in providing for them spiritual meat and spiritual drink; giving them *bread from heaven to eat*, and supplying them with water from the rock which followed them; yet *while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them*;⁹⁶ and *they were overthrown in the wilderness* at various times on account of their repeated transgressions. The apostle mentions some of their offences, and the judgments which these sins brought upon the people. He speaks of them in the language of admonition. *Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*. This was while Moses was in the mount

with God, receiving from Him the ten commandments, and the statutes and laws which they were to observe. *They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image,*⁹⁶ even under the mount which burned with fire, in the midst of blackness and darkness and tempest.⁹⁷ Their image was intended to be a visible representation, by means of which God was to be worshipped. It was a *feast to the Lord,*⁹⁸ which they proclaimed as to be observed by the worship of this image. But this was no excuse for their idolatry. They were threatened with being consumed for it; but Moses interceded for them and prevailed. Yet still *three thousand men*⁹⁸ fell by the sword of the Levites, in consequence of it. So displeasing is all idolatry and image worship in the sight of God. Yet the church of Rome has dared to set it up again, with the utmost impiety; and to teach that images are the books of the unlearned, whereby they may learn to worship God aright; and thus makes idolaters of those who call themselves Christians, and brings down the wrath of God upon them.

The apostle proceeds, *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.* The opportunity for this was afforded by the evil counsel of Balaam to the king of Moab, as the

⁹⁶ Ps. lxxviii. 30; cvi. 19. ⁹⁷ Heb. xii. 18. ⁹⁸ Exod. xxxii. 5, 28.

only means which that wicked prophet could devise for bringing the wrath of God upon the Israelites to their destruction. Well would it be for society were this admonition needless in the present day. It is the crying sin of the world now, as it has been in former ages; notwithstanding the Divine judgments which attend it in many instances; and which were manifested most especially when *God spared not the old world* on this account, *bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.*⁹⁹

The next admonition is, *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* This was when the manna, with which they had been fed day by day, was *loathed, as light bread;*¹ instead of being received with gratitude as the daily gift of Divine bounty to undeserving creatures. While their wants were miraculously supplied by the gift of manna, they complained that they had been *brought up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness.*¹ This is called tempting God. They were dissatisfied with what He gave them, and desired supplies of another kind. Instead of being discontented with the blessings we enjoy, we ought to be thankful for them, and to pray that we may be enabled to use the gifts of God to His glory.

The last admonition here given from the con-

⁹⁹ 2 Peter ii. 5.

¹ Numbers xxi. 5; xvi. 41, 49.

duct of the Israelites is, *Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.* This refers to the rebellion of Korah, and the murmuring of the congregation, after the awful death of him and his companions, *against Moses and Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord;*¹ when the plague broke out among them, and *fourteen thousand seven hundred*¹ of them were destroyed before Aaron could make an atonement for them. Their conduct showed that neither the mercies of God, nor His judgments had any suitable effect; they were continually rebelling against the Lord, unmindful of His goodness, and only for a time affected by His judgments. It is said in the text, *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.* Upon which the apostle founds the exhortation, *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* This is the

Third point to which our attention is to be directed. The Israelites thought themselves to be standing in the favour of God, because of the privileges which they enjoyed; but they were not solicitous to please God, notwithstanding all the benefits that He conferred upon them. They fell into various sins; they lusted after evil things. They fell into idolatry and fornication. They tempted God, and murmured against His deal-

ings with them. They were continually rebelling against Him. Let us beware of imitating their example. We have great privileges as they had. We have the word of God, the revelation of His will, in our hands. We have the ordinances of the house of God, and His holy sacraments administered to us. Let us use the means of grace with thankfulness. Let us not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, because of our great privileges; but let us seek to enjoy the favour and blessing of God in the use of them; and beware of *turning the grace of God into lasciviousness*; or of thinking that we may live *in sin that grace may abound*. To *fall from a state of grace* is a most fearful thing. To enjoy great privileges, and at the same time to live in disobedience to the word and will of God, is most awful. There is great reason to fear lest such persons should be given over to hardness of heart and impenitence; that they should lose all the benefit of the privileges with which they have been favoured, and should perish everlastingly. No outward privileges are of any avail, when sin is loved and practised. If the desire after evil things fills our hearts, and we follow after these desires, our Christian profession is of no avail; it will not prove the means of our salvation.

If we are sensible of our own weakness, and dread the power of our spiritual enemies, and fear lest we should be overcome by their tempt-

ations to fall into sin, the apostle points out to us, at the close of the Epistle for this day, how we may be preserved from falling. He says to the tried and afflicted people of God, *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* The trials with which you are visited have been endured by many of the children of God; they are trials *common to man* as a fallen creature; but these trials will be overruled for good by a faithful covenant-keeping God, who will support His people under them, and in His own time and way will deliver them out of the difficulties with which they may seem to be surrounded. Let them put their trust in Him, and all will be well. *He is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; and He will do it for them that seek His grace to support them, and to give them "a happy issue out of all their afflictions."* Importunate prayer at the throne of grace will obtain strength sufficient to enable us effectually to resist the temptations of our spiritual enemies. They who rely upon the faithfulness of God to His promises in Christ Jesus, shall not be ashamed of their hope. While they make Him their refuge, no evil shall happen to them; no enemy shall prevail against them.

SERMON XLV.

FOR THE

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

1 Corinthians xii. 11.

BUT ALL THESE WORKETH THAT ONE AND
THE SELF-SAME SPIRIT, DIVIDING TO
EVERY MAN SEVERALLY AS HE WILL.

THE subject of the Epistle for this day is concerning spiritual gifts, their nature, and the source from whence they are derived. This is a subject on which, it is intimated, professors of Christianity ought to be well informed, as it is desirable that they should obtain these gifts; and indeed, they are directed to *covet them earnestly* for the edification and consolation of their souls, *that God in all things may be glorified* in them and by them. Spiritual blessings are what we should all seek after. They convey the greatest benefits to the soul, and bring to it the highest degree of happiness. We should not be

satisfied with being in a state of ignorance respecting that which is so highly important for us to be acquainted with. But this is, notwithstanding, the case with too many persons. The blessings which true Christianity brings to the souls of those who heartily embrace it are not sought, and are therefore not obtained by them. Their value is unknown, their benefit is not experienced.

While our attention is directed to the important and interesting subject here brought before us, let it be our prayer that He, from whom all spiritual blessings proceed, would be pleased to seal instruction upon our minds, that the blessings which are the portion of the children of God may be ours in time and in eternity.

The apostle commences with observing, *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.* By spiritual gifts are to be understood those endowments which the Spirit of God bestows upon members of the church of Christ, for the benefit of others, of those around them, as well as on their own account individually. This appears from the description given of them in the verses immediately preceding the text. As these gifts were for the benefit of the church in general, the apostle was anxious that they should not be unknown, but that the benefit of receiving them should be experienced. They could be received only by believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; no others were partakers of

them. The apostle therefore reminds the Corinthians, whom he now addressed as Christians, of their former state as heathens. *Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.* They had been idolaters, worshippers of stocks and stones, of images which could neither see nor hear; and which gave the most base and degrading ideas of the Deity; for the most exalted notion which they conveyed was that the object of worship was altogether like its worshipper, a being of the same description, though armed perhaps with greater power or force than men can wield. The idols of the heathen were frequently the most hideous figures. The sight of them was calculated to fill the mind of the beholder with terror. The most sublime idea attached to them was, that they were armed with the thunders of omnipotence. But the malignant passions which the heathen usually ascribed to their false gods, showed that they worshipped devils, and not God; devils to whom the worst of human passions properly belonged. A consciousness of sin had filled their minds with apprehension of the just judgment of God, and therefore they represented the Divine Being to themselves in the most terrific character, and were anxious only to appease His wrath; which they were willing to do with the most revolting and cruel offerings, even to the burning of their own children

in the fire. That *God is love*² they knew not. It was reserved for Divine revelation to exhibit the God of glory in this most interesting and delightful character. Here alone it is made known, *that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, but having made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*³ Or, as our blessed Saviour declared, *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*⁴ To which doctrine also, *the Spirit beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. And this is the record, or witness, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son; he that hath, or believeth in, the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*⁵

For which reason our apostle remarks, *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.* To call Jesus accursed is to reject His salvation, to refuse to acknowledge Him as the Saviour, or to trust in Him as such. The Jews would not allow Him to be the promised Messiah, notwithstanding the undeniable proofs which He gave them that this was indeed His character, by the mighty works which were wrought by Him. They

² 1 John iv. 8; v. 6, 11, 12. ³ 2 Cor. v. 19, 21. ⁴ John iii. 16.

anathematized Him as an impostor for claiming this high title and character. The apostle Paul was one of those who had thus reviled the Lord Jesus, before his wonderful conversion to the faith of Christ. He declared to king Agrippa, *I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did in Jerusalem.*⁵ And to this state of his, I apprehend, he refers, when he said to the Romans, *I could*, or rather, *did wish that myself were accursed from Christ.*⁶ This was his wish, his boast, in the days of his ignorance. He then anathematized Christ and His people, and dreaded not His anathema. But when he was brought to the knowledge of Christ, he compassionated the state of his countrymen as being in the same sad condition in which he had himself been in the days of his ignorance. Here he shows that, while he felt and expressed an abhorrence of Christ, he was not under the influence of the Spirit of God, notwithstanding the high opinion he then entertained of himself, but was actuated by *the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience.*⁷ So likewise it may be said, that none who are opposed to the doctrine of salvation by Christ alone, and indeed none who are careless about the salvation of their own souls by faith in Him, are the children of God, or partakers of the Spirit of God.

⁵ Acts xxvi. 9, 10. ⁶ Romans ix. 3, 5. ⁷ Ephesians ii. 2.

On the other hand, *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* This is the testimony of the Spirit of God, *that Jesus is the Lord, or Jehovah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*⁸ He is *the Lord*, or the Governor of the universe in general, and of His church and people in particular; as He said, *All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.*⁹ Whoever therefore makes this confession, *that Jesus is the Lord*, declares what is agreeable to the testimony of the Spirit of God respecting Him; and he who says this from a principle of subjection to His authority, seeking Divine grace to enable him to live in obedience to His holy will and commandments, is accounted a member of the mystical body of Christ, a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. It is not the mere declaration of the lips that is here spoken of, but the language of the heart, expressed with the mouth, and acted upon in the life and conduct. As the apostle says at another time, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*⁸

The apostle, having made this statement respecting the confession of faith, which is made by

⁸ Romans ix. 5; x. 9, 10.

⁹ Matthew xxviii. 18.

every member of the mystical body of Christ and partaker of the Holy Ghost, adds that the members of the church of Christ are possessors of various gifts, which are all, notwithstanding their diversity, derived from the same Divine Spirit. *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.* He bestows all spiritual gifts upon believers in Christ, as it seemeth fit to His godly wisdom. The nature of these gifts is described afterwards. It is said also, *There are differences of administrations*, or ministries, *but the same Lord.* Christ is the Lord, or Head of His body the church, to whom belongs the ordering of its administrations. It is from Him that the ministers of His church derive their office. He is the Door, through which the shepherds of the flock must enter into the sheepfold. Faith in Him, and love to Him, and subjection to His authority, are the primary qualifications for the pastors of the flock of Christ; without which they have climbed up some other way than by His appointment to the office which they have taken upon themselves. The differences of ministries are, I conceive, the divers orders which Christ hath appointed in His church, respecting which it is said, *He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*¹⁰ The various orders of ministers are appointed in the church, to be in an especial

manner the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is said further, *There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.* The effectual working in the use of all the appointed means of grace, proceeds from the Divine power and blessing. Vain is the exercise of any gifts, however great, of spiritual gifts, however important; useless are the ministrations of the appointed ministers of the gospel, however eminent they may be, unless God give the increase. *So then neither is he that planteth, any thing; neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*¹¹ He *worketh all in all*, that to Him alone all the glory may be ascribed. We see here the Three Persons of the ever blessed Trinity, spoken of as exercising Divine power, or as the one living and true God. The Holy Spirit bestows diversities of spiritual gifts. The Lord Jesus Christ orders the administrations of His church. God the Father effectually *worketh all in all* for the promotion of His own glory. Divine power is thus ascribed to each separately, to all collectively.

The apostle, having made this statement, proceeds to the subject with which he had set out, the *spiritual gifts, concerning which he would not have them ignorant.* He remarks, *The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.* The spiritual gifts referred to, are vouchsafed

¹⁰ Eph. iv. 11, 12. ¹¹ 1 Cor. iii. 6; ii. 7, 6, 10; i. 30, 24. ¹² Col. ii. 3.

for the benefit of the individual himself who partakes of them, but most especially for the advantage of the whole church of Christ and people of God, that all may be profited by them. These gifts are then enumerated; first, the ordinary operations of the Spirit of God, as the most useful to the church; and then His extraordinary operations as signs to them that believed not, whereby they might be assured of the truth of the doctrine of Christianity, which was attended with such remarkable displays of Divine power. *To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit.*

The first spiritual gift is *the word of wisdom*. This has been supposed to be another expression for the gospel of Christ, which the apostle terms *the wisdom of God in a mystery*, and says of it, *We speak wisdom among them that are perfect; that wisdom which God hath revealed unto us by His Spirit.*¹¹ In reference to which he declares, that *Christ Jesus is of God made unto us wisdom;*¹¹ and that in Him *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*¹² *Christ is the wisdom of God.*¹¹ *The word of wisdom* is that which relates to Him, by the belief of which men are made wise unto salvation. *This wisdom was not in other ages made known unto the sons of men, as it was revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*¹³ St. Paul says respecting himself, *that by revelation*

manner the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is said further, *There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.* The effectual working in the use of all the appointed means of grace, proceeds from the Divine power and blessing. Vain is the exercise of any gifts, however great, of spiritual gifts, however important; useless are the ministrations of the appointed ministers of the gospel, however eminent they may be, unless God give the increase. *As I am water, I can but quench, any thing, neither is that counted, but God that giveth the increase."* He worketh all in all, that is Him alone all the glory may be ascribed. We see here the Three Persons of the ever blessed Trinity, spoken of as exercising Divine power, it is the one living and true God. The Holy Spirit bestows diversities of spiritual gifts. The Lord Jesus Christ orders the administrations of His church. God the Father effectually worketh all in all for the promotion of His own glory. Divine power is thus ascribed to each separately, to all collectively.

The apostle, having made this statement, proceeds to the subject with which we are now concerned, *the spiritual gifts, concerning which ye shall not have them given.* The distribution of the Spirit is given according to His will. The spiritual gifts are not to be reckoned

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*God made known unto him the mystery of Christ;*¹³ and he prayed for those to whom he declared this word of wisdom, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.¹³ It is by the teaching of the Spirit of God alone that men are enabled to receive Christ as the wisdom of God, and are made wise unto salvation, through believing in His name.

It follows, *To another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.* Knowledge, as distinguished from wisdom, is supposed to relate to an acquaintance with the holy scriptures, which were then confined to the writings of the Old Testament; and with the mind of the Spirit therein revealed. The expression may therefore be considered to imply, that the Spirit of God opened the understanding of those to whom He gave *the word of knowledge*, to understand the scriptures. This was a matter of such great importance to the first preachers of the gospel, that our Saviour *expounded unto His disciples in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself;*¹⁴ and then opened their understanding also, that they might understand the scriptures;¹⁴ and be able to explain them to others. We find the apostles therefore declaring that they said *none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come,*¹⁵ when they preached

¹³ Eph. iii. 5, 3; i. 17. ¹⁴ Luke xxiv. 27, 45. ¹⁵ Acts xxvi. 22.

the gospel of Christ. The Bereans were accordingly commended, because they *searched the scriptures daily*, to ascertain for themselves *whether those things were so* as the apostles taught. And the consequence was that *many of them believed*.¹⁶ In this search, or while they were engaged in it, they doubtless sought and obtained the aid of the Spirit of God, who opened their minds to receive the truths of His holy word, and applied them to their hearts by His almighty power and grace.

The next gift is, *To another faith, by the same Spirit*. Faith to believe in Christ, and to appropriate His merits to the soul for our benefit, is the gift of God. So the apostle taught the Ephesians: *By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God*.¹⁷ It is from Him that we must seek to obtain it. It was therefore said to the Philippians, *Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, to believe on Him*.¹⁸ This gift had been bestowed upon them of the riches of His grace, so that they believed to the saving of their souls. But the faith here spoken of, as well as the gifts afterwards mentioned, may relate to the extraordinary operations of the Spirit of God, which were vouchsafed to the church of Christ in its infancy, for the confirmation of the truth of the gospel. This mira-

¹⁶ Acts xvii. 11, 12.¹⁷ Eph. ii. 8.¹⁸ Phil. i. 29.

culous faith is spoken of in the following chapter, where the apostle says, *Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* The Spirit of God was the Author of this faith. It was granted for the benefit of the church of Christ, and to promote the belief of the gospel among mankind. But a man might be endowed with this miraculous faith, or power to work miracles, without being the better for it as to his own soul.

So likewise with regard to the other spiritual gifts here mentioned : *To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit ; to another the working of miracles ; to another prophecy ; to another discerning of spirits ; to another divers kinds of tongues ; to another the interpretation of tongues.* All these miraculous gifts were bestowed on the primitive church of Christ, for the purpose of affording evident proof of the Divine origin of Christianity, that it was indeed a religion which proceeded from God. That diseases of various kinds were miraculously healed, that future events were foretold, that the gospel was preached in foreign languages by persons who had not been previously instructed in or acquainted with those languages, we have evidence in the history of the Acts of the Apostles. And there is reason to believe that these miraculous powers continued for a time to be manifested in the church of Christ. But they ceased with the occasion for them ; as

Christianity was to be spread by ordinary means, under the Divine blessing, when its Divine origin had been fully demonstrated. It is folly indeed to look for the renewal of these miraculous powers in the present day. They would answer no useful purpose, since the evidence of the truth of Christianity has long been shown to rest on a sure foundation. The translation of the holy scriptures into all the known languages of the world, and the printing of the sacred volume in these *divers kinds of tongues*, and its distribution among all nations, answers the great end for which the gift of tongues was bestowed in the apostolic age. The various languages of the earth may now be learned by ordinary means; and wherever missionaries go forth with the word of God in their hands, to communicate the knowledge of it in the languages of the people to whom they are sent, the blessing of God will attend them; their labours have not any where been hitherto in vain; and the blessing of God may at all times be expected to accompany them. It should be our prayer *that the word of the Lord*, which is now translated and printed in one hundred and fifty languages and dialects, *may have free course and be glorified*; and we should contribute as far as our means and circumstances may admit, to the promotion of this great work; and rejoice in the success which attends the circulation of the sacred volume in all parts of the globe.

In the first ages of the Christian church, those who were favoured with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, did not receive them on account of any superior personal excellence which they possessed over others, not for their own holiness, as St. Peter said, not because they were better than others; for the apostle was obliged to reprove the Corinthians for their folly in desiring to exhibit their gifts, that they might procure admiration from their fellow creatures. These spiritual gifts were entrusted to the persons who received them, for the benefit of the church of Christ, and for the advancement of true religion, and the promotion of the glory of God among mankind in general. It is an awful thing to make use of the gifts of the Spirit of God, to minister to the pride or vanity of man. Yet this is what fallen creatures are continually prone to do.

In order to show that whatever gifts were bestowed upon the members of the church of Christ, those who received them were indebted to God alone, and were bound to use them to His glory; the apostle concludes in the text, *All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.* From the nature of the miraculous powers and gifts which have been described, it is evident that He who was the Author and Dispenser of them, must be a Divine Person. This is plainly taken for granted. It is however also expressly stated at the close of

the chapter, that these things were the gifts of God Himself to His church. *God hath set some in the church ; first, apostles ; secondarily, prophets ; thirdly, teachers ;* these three orders of ministers of the church of Christ are of Divine appointment ; and for the purpose of making them extensively useful, *after that* they were enabled to work *miracles ; then gifts of healings* were bestowed upon them ; *helps, governments, diversities of tongues ;* which most excellent gifts the apostle exhorts them to *covet earnestly*, that they might *excel to the edifying of the church ;* and to the conviction and conversion of those who were ignorant of the gospel of Christ. The Spirit spoken of in the text then is God Himself ; and it is said of Him, that He divideth *to every man severally as He will ;* or according to the counsel of His own will ; which shows His personality. The source from whence spiritual gifts are derived is stated, in order to lead us to apply to Him for those blessings which we need for our own welfare ; and which are needful to promote the diffusion of the gospel of Christ, and the glory of God in the world.

We are to consider the end for which spiritual gifts were vouchsafed in former ages, that we may be led to pray that such gifts as are required for the advancement of the honour of God in the world, may be granted to the church of Christ in our day. The extraordinary operations of the

Spirit of God have ceased in the church, but His ordinary ones remain. He gives *the word of wisdom* and *the word of knowledge* to His ministering servants, so that they speak the wisdom of God, the testimony concerning Jesus, by faith in whom men are made wise unto salvation; and by diligently searching the holy scriptures, they are enabled to declare from them *the whole counsel of God*, all the truths which He has revealed for the edification and admonition and comfort of His church. But He *will be enquired of* by His people, that He may *do for them* as He has promised. It is in answer to importunate, persevering prayer, that spiritual blessings are bestowed. The ministers of Christ must implore the teaching and grace of the Holy Spirit, to enable them rightly to divide the word of truth, or to dispense *the word of wisdom* and *the word of knowledge*; and the hearers of the word of God must pray for the same teaching and grace to give them a right understanding of it, and faith to embrace the truth as it is in Jesus. Prayerless hearers are unprofitable hearers of the word of God. They hear it in vain. It does not sink into their hearts, or bear fruit in their lives. They go away and forget it; it is *not mixed with faith* in their minds; so that they do not believe to the saving of their souls. Let it be our earnest prayer that faith may come to us by hearing the word of life, that it may be the means of our salvation.

SERMON XLVI.

FOR THE

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

1 Corinthians xv. 10, 11.

BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM: AND HIS GRACE WHICH WAS BESTOWED UPON ME WAS NOT IN VAIN; BUT I LABOURED MORE ABUNDANTLY THAN THEY ALL: YET NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS WITH ME. THEREFORE WHETHER IT WERE I OR THEY, SO WE PREACH, AND SO YE BELIEVED.

IN these words the apostle acknowledges the obligations under which he was laid to the goodness of God for every blessing that he enjoyed; and show the powerful influence which Divine grace had over him; that it caused him to labour most abundantly in endeavouring to promote the cause of God in the world to the utmost of his

ability ; and while he made known the gospel of Christ, the same grace operated in the hearts of many who heard it, so that they believed its report, and were made partakers of the blessings consequent upon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of perishing sinners.

In the Epistle for this day the subject of his ministry is stated, the great truths which he constantly proclaimed, and which were made effectual by the operation of the Holy Spirit for the conversion of sinners from the error of their ways, their reconciliation to God, and the eternal salvation of their souls. Let it be our prayer, that the grace of the Holy Spirit may be bestowed upon us, while our meditations are directed to the subjects here brought before us, that believing the word of Divine truth, we may possess that joy and peace which it was designed to communicate, and may be enabled to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The apostle commences with addressing those *among whom he had gone preaching the kingdom of God : Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel, which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.* Here we see that it was not by a succession of novelties in doctrine, that the apostle sought to attract the attention of his hearers. He had preached the gospel to them, they had received it, and they stood or continued in the profession of it, and yet he still declared

it to them; he considered it needful to repeat to them again and again the same truths as he had before delivered; which showed his anxious desire that they might have a right and simple understanding of the leading doctrines of the gospel of Christ, and that their minds might be deeply impressed and imbued with them. The vast importance of the gospel of Christ appears from his assertion respecting it, *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* The gospel of Christ is the means of salvation. It was for the purpose of promoting the salvation of mankind, that our blessed Saviour commanded it to be preached to every creature throughout the world. But in order that this benefit may be derived from it, it must be kept in memory, or held fast, as the marginal reading is, it must be adhered to; it must be retained in the mind; the heart must be held under its influence; the life and conduct must be regulated by it. Without this a profession of faith is vain. While then we hear the gospel of Christ, we should pray that its truths may be written upon our hearts by the Spirit of God, that receiving the truth in the love of it, we may grow thereby. There is such a thing as an empty, vain, unprofitable, unfruitful profession of faith; a believing in vain. Let us fear lest our profession be of this kind. Let us seek to have our hearts brought under the influence of

the truths of the gospel, that the blessedness derived from believing it with all the heart may be our portion.

The apostle having shown the great importance of the gospel as the means of salvation, and expressed his anxiety that its blessings might be enjoyed by the persons to whom he preached it, recapitulates its leading truths. He says, *I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures.* He stated, *first of all*, that fact which is the most important to be believed, the death of Christ as the substitute for guilty sinners. This was the *glad tidings* which the apostle Paul delighted continually to proclaim, that death being the wages of sin, Christ Jesus, the Lord of glory, came into the world, and suffered death; in order that through faith in His name the sinful children of men might be made partakers of eternal life. What a wonderful declaration is this, that pardon and salvation are bestowed through Jesus Christ our Saviour, upon all them that believe in His name. It might be expected that such a gracious declaration, made in the name of the God of heaven, would be hailed with joy by all the transgressors of the law of God who should hear of it. But instead of this, how many, alas! hear of it with the utmost indifference and unconcern, as if it were a matter in which they were entirely uninterested; as if it were not "for us men and

for our salvation," that the Lord of glory "came down from heaven," and suffered death upon the cross. Let us ask ourselves, What effect has the declaration of the love of Christ in dying for us produced upon our minds? Has it caused any compunction of heart in us, any sorrow for sin? What grief ought we to feel, when we think *that Christ died for our sins; that He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.*¹⁹ The apostle speaks to the Romans of the love of Christ in this respect with the greatest admiration. *When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us; when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*²⁰

This doctrine of the scriptures is *first of all* in importance, since the cordial belief of it is necessary to salvation. They who do embrace it with their whole heart, are made *wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*,²¹ and shall be

¹⁹ Isaiah liii. 5, 6. ²⁰ Rom. vi. 6—8, 10. ²¹ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

saved everlastingly. For this reason the apostle repeated it over and over again. It was not sufficient that he had preached it, that they had received it, that they continued in the profession of it. It must still again and again be declared to them, that they might keep it in memory ; it must still be enforced upon them, that they should not believe it in vain, with a careless or unfruitful profession, but so as to be saved by it. If the ministers of Christ bring forward this subject continually, they only follow the apostolical example. It becomes the hearers of the gospel to have it deeply impressed upon their memory, their minds, and hearts, that they may enjoy the comfort of it day by day, and may partake of the salvation which it will bring hereafter to all who are interested in it by a living faith.

This doctrine being declared *first of all*, the apostle mentions other important facts connected with it. The next is, *And that He was buried*. From the burial of Christ we learn that He was really dead ; since, in proof of it, His dead body was committed to the tomb. His burial was also a token of the removal of the curse from those whom He *redeemed from the curse of the law*, when on the cross He was *made a curse for us* ; so that His believing people shall not be visited with it any more ; *there shall be no more curse* to them. It is further stated, *And that He rose again the third day, according to the scrip-*

tures; He rose as the victorious Conqueror of death and the grave, *who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.* He rose again to give His people an assurance of their complete acquittal from all the charges which the accuser of the brethren might bring against them, and from all the penalties which had been incurred by their transgression of His holy law. The resurrection of Christ from the dead was a subject on which the apostles of Christ dwelt with delight. Its importance was great, as affording a proof that all was accomplished which He had come into the world to perform; and an intimation that He was gone into heaven in human nature, as the Forerunner of His people, and as their Advocate and Intercessor before the throne of the Majesty on high.

The apostle enumerates some of the proofs which had been given of the resurrection of Christ, *That He was seen of Cephas, or Peter, then of the twelve; after that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep; after that He was seen of James, then of all the apostles.* Here were numerous credible witnesses of the resurrection of Christ adduced, who had seen Him after He was risen from the dead, at different times before His ascension into heaven; most of whom were living when this epistle was written, though some had departed this life, or

fallen asleep; a beautiful expression used to denote the death of believers in Christ. So it is said, *If we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*²² They sleep in Jesus until the morning of the resurrection, when they *shall appear with Him in glory.*²³ It is said of the first martyr Stephen, that *he fell asleep.*²⁴ The true Christian need not dread death more than sleep; for he shall rise again to the life immortal, after his body has been laid in the dust of death. *This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality; and then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*²⁵

But the apostle had proof of the truth of the fact of the resurrection of Christ in his own experience. He had himself seen the risen and exalted Saviour. He says, *Last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.* The risen Saviour was seen by St. Paul in a remarkable manner. The Lord Jesus stopped the fierce persecutor in the midst of his mad career, and gave him another heart, so that he who before had persecuted the church of Christ, and wasted it, became a preacher of that faith which he had previously laboured with all his might to destroy. To mark the sense which he

²² 1 Thess. iv. 14. ²³ Col. iii. 4. ²⁴ Acts vii. 60. ²⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 54.

entertained of his unworthiness of this favour, he calls himself *one born out of due time*, or an abortive, a weak contemptible creature; which he explains by adding: *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.* Thus he speaks of himself with the greatest humility, when he calls to mind that the Lord Jesus had condescended to appear to him. And we find him ever making mention of his conduct before his conversion with the deepest penitence, and the most unfeigned regret; but at the same time connecting with it heartfelt gratitude to his redeeming God and Saviour. He observes to Timothy that he *was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious; but, says he, I obtained mercy for this cause, that in me first, or the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.*²⁶ It was to the mercy of God that he was indebted for every blessing he enjoyed.

In the text he ascribes, in like manner, all the blessedness of which he was a partaker, to the grace or free unmerited favour of God. *By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I,*

²⁶ 1 Timothy i. 13, 16, 14.

but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed. Here we may observe,

First, The cause of the success which attended the ministry of the apostles of Christ;

Secondly, The effect produced upon themselves by Divine grace; and

Thirdly, The object proposed by their ministry.

First, That which alone duly qualified St. Paul and the other apostles of Christ for the work in which they all of them so ardently engaged, was *the grace of God*. He says to the Galatians, *It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen;*²⁷ and to Timothy he declares, *The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant*²⁸ towards me. By this grace he was set apart to the apostleship; and by it he was enabled to labour in a manner *approved of God*, as a *workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*²⁹ But notwithstanding that his labours extended over a great part of the Roman empire, *so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum he fully preached the gospel of Christ*; going, as he said, *not where Christ was named, lest he should build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written: To whom He was*

²⁷ Gal. i. 15. ²⁸ 2 Tim. ii. 15. ²⁹ Rom. xv. 19—21.

*not spoken of, they shall see; and they that have not heard, shall understand;*²⁹ yet he gave himself no credit whatever for his great exertions; his language was, *Not I, but the grace of God which was with me,*³⁰ did the work. It was *exceeding abundant grace* which caused him to be *in labours more abundant*³¹ than others; and made those labours effectual to promote the object proposed by them. When *Paul planted* and *Apollos watered*, it was *God* that *gave the increase*. So then, concludes the apostle, *neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.*³⁰ All the glory is to be ascribed to Him whose grace renders effectual the labours of His servants. It is said of the first Christians, that *great grace was upon them all.*³² They were usually spoken of as those *which had believed through grace*,³² and the effects produced upon them were such as caused gladness of heart to others who witnessed them; as it is said, that when Barnabas went to Antioch, *and had seen the grace of God*, as it was manifested by those who had *believed and turned to the Lord*, he was *glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord.*³²

If we would see success attending the ministry of the gospel, we must pray earnestly for abundant grace to be bestowed by God. His pro-

²⁹1 Cor. xv. 10; iii. 6, 7. ³¹2 Cor. xi. 23. ³²Acts iv. 33; xviii. 27; xi. 23.

mises are given to us that we may plead with Him for their fulfilment, and find Him faithful to fulfil His word, on which He hath caused us to hope. Let us then be importunate at the throne of grace for His promised blessing, that Divine grace may be vouchsafed, and *the God of all grace* may be glorified; that *the gospel* may be *preached*, as it was of old, *with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*,³³ to give *testimony unto the word of His grace*,³⁴ and sinners may be converted from the error of their ways, and believers built up on their most holy faith. It is in answer to humble, importunate, and persevering prayer, that the blessing of God is usually bestowed. Let us make use of the appointed means, and the end will doubtless be answered. It is a praying people who make a profitable ministry. This cannot too frequently be pressed upon the consideration of the hearers of the word of God. Let me intreat you to consider this seriously; and before you come to the house of God, as well as while you are in it, and when you have left it, pray for grace to be enabled to *worship Him in spirit and in truth*,³⁵ while you present yourselves among His worshippers in His house of prayer; and pray for the hearing ear and understanding heart to be given you, to enable you to receive the word of the truth of the

³³ 1 Peter i. 12.³⁴ Acts xiv. 3.³⁵ John iv. 24.

gospel in the love of it, that you may grow thereby, and your profiting may appear unto all men. And forget not to pray for us who minister to you the word of life, that we may be enabled to set it forth in such a manner that the end may be answered for which it is made known, that it may be believed, and those who hear it may enjoy the happiness consequent upon being reconciled to God, and made wise unto salvation by faith in Christ Jesus.

When the apostle said, *By the grace of God I am what I am*, he spake of himself not merely as a minister of Christ, but as one who believed in His name; and ascribed every blessing of which he partook to Divine grace. We may notice,

Secondly, The effect of Divine grace upon him, of which he speaks to Timothy as affording a *pattern to them which should hereafter believe unto life everlasting*. The apostle knew that he owed himself and all he had and was to the grace of God. This grace changed his heart, so that his affections were set no longer on things on the earth, but on things above. This grace influenced his life, and actuated him to exertion in promoting the cause of God in the world. He became himself *a new creature in Christ Jesus*, by Divine grace; so that *old things were passed away* in him, and *all things become new*. *All things* in him were thenceforward *of God*. He had respect to God continually in all the actions

of his life. His whole desire was to accomplish the will of God, to lay himself out in every way, by every possible means, to promote His glory. He laid aside all selfish considerations, and gave himself up in soul and body to be entirely the Lord's, devoted to His service, and ready to spend and be spent in spreading the knowledge of the gospel of Christ, that he might be the means of bringing salvation to the souls of his perishing fellow creatures. He *conferred not with flesh and blood*, neither seeking his own ease, nor troubling himself about the opinion that others might form of him; but employed himself as the servant of God, in doing His will from the heart, not with eye service, as a man pleaser, but in singleness of heart, as one who served the Lord Christ. It was the grace of God and that alone which made the apostle what he was. And the same grace is able to qualify others, as it qualified him for the work in which he was engaged, and enabled him to accomplish it. Did we earnestly seek this grace to be vouchsafed to us, we should obtain it, as he did. Let us then implore it earnestly, importunately, perseveringly, for ourselves, and for all around us; that we and the whole church of Christ being abundantly influenced by Divine grace, may show forth His praise and glorify His holy name; and that many may be led to turn to the Lord, and seek His favour with their whole hearts, and partake

of His blessing, both in this life and in that which is to come.

The object proposed by the ministry of the gospel is to be noticed in the *last* place. This is intimated when the apostle observes, *Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach and so ye believed.* It was in order that faith might come by hearing, that the gospel of Christ was preached. Unless it be believed with all the heart by those who hear it, it is preached in vain. It is said of some, that *the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*³⁶ It is of great importance then that we should believe the word of God. If we hear it, without believing it, it will rise up in judgment against us to our condemnation. If we truly believe it with all our hearts, it will be the means of the salvation of our souls. We have reason therefore to fear lest we should enjoy the means of grace without being profited by them. It should be our concern that we may be numbered among *them that believe to the saving of their souls.*³⁶ Let us then *examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith.*³⁷ Let us look into our own hearts, and see whether the grace of God operates in us. Unless we are under its influence, we cannot heartily believe the gospel of Christ. We may hear *that Christ died for our sins*, but we shall hear it in

³⁶ Hebrews iv. 2; x. 39.

³⁷ 2 Corinthians xiii. 5; vi. 1.

vain. We may believe the historical fact, but it will be to no purpose. It is the most awful state in which hearers can be, to have the judgment informed on the subject of Divine truth, and yet the heart to remain unaffected by it; to know and assent to the theory of the gospel, to be persuaded of the truth of the holy scriptures, and not to have the affections influenced by it, so as to produce love to Christ in the heart, and holy obedience to His blessed will in the life. Let me beseech you *not to receive the grace of God in vain*,³⁷ nor to hear the gospel in a careless manner, as though it were a matter of indifference whether you believed it or not. But while you hear it, pray for Divine grace to be bestowed upon you. Pray for a new heart to be given you, and a right spirit to be put within you. Seek to treasure up the word of God in your memory, pray that it may be written upon your hearts, that you may not be forgetful hearers, but doers of the word, receiving it with pure affection, and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit in your life and conduct; that *the God of all grace* may be glorified; and your immortal souls may be eternally saved.

SERMON XLVII.

FOR THE

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE TWO DISPENSATIONS.

2 Corinthians iii. 9.

FOR IF THE MINISTRATION OF CONDEMNATION BE GLORY, MUCH MORE DOTH THE MINISTRATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCEED IN GLORY.

IN the Epistle for this day, the Mosaical and the Christian dispensations are contrasted with each other, and a description is given of the peculiar characteristics of each ; of which the text also affords a specimen. A right understanding on this subject is of great importance ; for, through not observing the distinction which subsists between them, many humble and self-diffident persons are held in a state of bondage and disquietude, which makes them uncomfortable through life, and full of fears as to the issue in

eternity. The text naturally divides itself into two parts, to both of which the context affords illustration. Let us consider the topics here presented to us, with prayer that the Holy Spirit would be pleased to vouchsafe to us His blessing, that our meditation on His holy word may not be in vain.

The supposition with which the text commences, *If the ministration of condemnation be glory*, is intended to convey the strongest affirmation that the Mosaical dispensation was truly a glorious one. And that it was so appears evident, when we compare the state of the persons to whom it was vouchsafed, with that of the other nations of the earth during the time of its continuance. The Israelites were so fully persuaded of its superiority to every thing else in the world at that time, that they said, with gratitude to their Divine Lawgiver, *He showed His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for His judgments they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.*³⁸ In reference to this Divine dispensation, their lawgiver Moses asked them, *What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law, which I set before you this day?*³⁹ This dispensation was glorious in its delivery. The power and glory of the Divine

³⁸ Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20. ³⁹ Deut. iv. 8. ⁴⁰ Exod. xix. 16, 18, 19; xx. 20.

Majesty were displayed in the most awful manner at the giving of the law. *There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.*⁴⁰ Here was every thing calculated to produce a deep and lasting impression upon the mind, and a dread of the consequences of disobedience to that Divine Being, whose power and glory were displayed in so conspicuous and awful a manner. The threatenings of the law against disobedience were enforced by an exhibition of Divine power sufficient to appal the stoutest heart. And it was designed to excite such feelings as might deter those who witnessed it from the commission of sin. *Moses said unto the people, who were alarmed at this manifestation of the Divine power, Fear not, for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your eyes, that ye sin not.*⁴⁰ But how transitory those feelings were, notwithstanding they produced such terror in the first instance, appears from the people falling into idolatry, while Moses was yet in the mount with God, and the devouring fire was still before their eyes

upon the top of it. Terrors and threatenings were the sanctions of the Mosaic dispensation; and the effect which it produced by them was shown under it to the fullest extent.

But this glory which attended the giving of the law, is not that which is referred to by the apostle in the text. In the preceding verse he speaks of the glory of the countenance of Moses, which prevented the Israelites from looking steadfastly upon him, and made them afraid to come nigh to him, when he descended from the mount with the tables of the law in his hand. As the minister of that dispensation, Moses was invested with a temporary glory, which made the Israelites stand in awe of him. His ministry is called in the text *the ministry of condemnation*. The precepts of the moral law were all prohibitions. They showed the sins which mankind were prone to commit, the manner in which they failed in their duty toward God and their duty toward their neighbour. And to those who committed the sins forbidden, the law declared, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*. It thus pointed out to fallen man that he was in a state of condemnation before God. It dealt with him as a transgressor. It filled him with alarm, and held him under bondage to fear lest he should receive the wages due to his sins, or suffer the penalty of transgression. It provided no means

of pardon for his offences, no way of escape from the wrath which it denounced against sin; and it promised no grace to enable him to obey its righteous commands. It condemned him as a transgressor, and left him under sentence, to suffer the penalty when the time of his earthly probation had expired. The apostle therefore calls it *the ministration of death*. It proclaimed *death* to be *the wages of sin*, the death of both body and soul, or temporal and eternal death.

There are instances on record that *he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses*,⁴¹ on their testimony being given that he had transgressed it. Such was the case with the man who *blasphemed the name of the Lord, and cursed*. On which occasion it was solemnly declared, *Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin; and he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him*.⁴² Such was also the case with the sabbath-breaker, who was *found gathering sticks upon the sabbath day*. *The Lord said unto Moses, The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp*.⁴³ The breach of the third and fourth commandments is thought lightly of by many persons in the present day; but it is an awful truth, that God will not hold guiltless

⁴¹ Heb. x. 28. ⁴² Lev. xxiv. 11, 15, 16. ⁴³ Num. xv. 32, 35.

those who despise His holy law. Men may scoff at His commandments while they are in this world; they may manifest their ingratitude to Him, while *He giveth to them all life and breath and all things*. They may partake of His benefits, and set at nought the Giver, to whom they are indebted for them; but His word declares that *the soul that sinneth it shall die*; and it will be found *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*,⁴⁴ when *His mercy is clean gone for ever*: *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner then appear, when God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil?*⁴⁵ *They shall go away into everlasting punishment*; eternal death will be their portion.

It is intimated further, that the Mosaical dispensation was the ministry of the letter, written and engraven in stones. We are ready to think how valuable must the tables of the law have been, when it is said of them, *The tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables*.⁴⁶ But if the commandments were so important, that God was pleased Himself to engrave them upon the stones, in order to cause the greater attention to be paid to them, how dreadful must be the consequence of disregarding them. It was *the ministration of condemnation, of death, of the letter which killeth*,

⁴⁴ Heb. x. 31. ⁴⁵ Eccles. xii. 14. ⁴⁶ Ex. xxxii. 16; xxxiv. 29-31, 33.

to the disobedient. But notwithstanding, it was a glorious dispensation, as a revelation of the will of God to man; pointing out the way to happiness and the enjoyment of the favour of God, by means of *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*. It was glorious in its sanctions, and glorious in its minister.

To this the apostle refers, by saying that it was *so glorious, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance*. The sacred historian relates, that it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in his hand; and when Aaron, and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them, and they came nigh. And till he had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face.⁴⁶ The glory of his countenance was the reflection of the glory of the Lord upon him, while He talked with him. This glory was to be done away; it passed off after a little time. It was transitory, like the dispensation of which it was an emblem. But for a season the minister of this dispensation appeared so glorious, that his countenance struck terror into those who beheld it. And the dispensation itself, as long as it lasted, was evidently the most glorious manifestation of the goodness of God that had ever been displayed.

But however glorious it appeared to the Israelites for many ages, the apostle shows that the glory of the Mosaic dispensation fades away when it is compared with the Christian dispensation. The former has no glory at all in comparison with the latter. *For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.* The Christian dispensation is not indeed glorious in its terrors as the Mosaic was. It was not promulgated amidst thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes; but by the heavenly hosts appearing in glory, and singing in joyful concert, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.* Its nature may be illustrated by a circumstance in the history of the prophet Elijah. He went into the wilderness, and stood on mount Horeb. *And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*⁴⁷ So it is by the *still small voice* of the Spirit of God, a voice not heard, unnoticed, disregarded by the children of this world, that the glory of the Christian dispensation is manifested to the hearts and consciences of those who are made partakers of its blessings.

Its Minister also was as far superior to Moses, as the dispensation is more excellent. For *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds ; who is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person, and upholdeth all things by the word of His power.*⁴⁷ And it is said especially, that He was counted worthy of more glory than Moses; inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. And Moses was verily faithful in all his house as a servant; but Christ as a Son, over His own house.⁴⁸ He was the only begotten Son of God. Moses was a faithful servant of God. Christ was the Builder of the house, or *He who made all things*. Moses was an eminent stone in the building; was one of His creatures.

And as to the dispensation itself, which was introduced by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the ministration of it is *the ministration of righteousness*, or of justification, instead of being *the ministration of condemnation*; and it is not *the ministration of death*, nor of the letter which killeth, but of the Spirit which giveth life. As the ministration of righteousness, it makes known the way in which the sinful guilty children of men may

⁴⁷ 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

⁴⁸ Heb. i. 1—3; iii. 3, 5, 6.

be justified or accounted righteous before God, even through the obedience unto death of our Divine Redeemer, *who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification: therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁴⁹ This is the only foundation of hope with respect to God and heaven that fallen man can have. How glorious is that dispensation which makes it known to us! How highly ought we to prize it! How gratefully should we accept the benefits which it confers, and seek to enjoy the consolations which it brings to the consciences of those who heartily embrace it. It is not, however, until a man has been led to see that as a sinner he is cut off from communion with God, and all hope of heavenly blessedness, that he is anxious to know any thing on the subject of justification before God, or that he is disposed to ask the question, *How can man be just with God?* When he sees himself to be under the condemnation and curse of the law of God, as a transgressor, and exposed to eternal death as the wages of sin, then it is that he begins to set a value upon *the righteousness of God*, which is manifested without the law, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, who are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ

*Jesus.*⁴⁹ Here is a plain statement of what is meant by *the ministration of righteousness*. The perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ in human nature to the holy law of God, is placed to the account of them that put their trust in Him; so that *by His obedience* they are *made righteous*, or justified before God by faith. God *made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*⁵⁰

This doctrine of being “accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings,” is a fundamental article of our holy religion. He who has a right understanding of it, will love the Lord his God with all his heart, and will walk humbly with Him, and circumspectly before Him in his life and conduct. On the other hand, if our views on this subject are obscure, we must naturally look to our imperfect obedience to the law of God as the ground of our hope of acceptance with Him; on which subject the apostle plainly asserts, *As many as are of the works of the law, or seek to be justified before God by their imperfect obedience to it, are under the curse.* If our hope for the favour of God be founded upon our own imperfect obedience, we shall incur His displeasure, instead of being accepted with Him. Jesus Christ is the only

⁴⁹ Rom. iv. 25; v. i; iii. 21—24. ⁵⁰ 2 Cor. v. 21.

Mediator between God and man; and unless we come before God, trusting in His merits alone, it is utterly impossible that we can be accepted with Him. He is *the Lord our righteousness*, on whom we must depend for acceptance in the Divine presence, or we shall be rejected by Him, who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity*. If we rely upon His righteousness we shall look up to the God of heaven as our Father, and shall be accepted with Him as *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*. Let the righteousness of Christ then be that in which we place our confidence, that being reconciled to God through His beloved Son, we may live as the children of God, as in His presence and to His glory.

It may be said also, that the Christian dispensation is *the ministration of righteousness*, not only as it reveals God's method of justifying sinners through faith in the merits of Jesus Christ the righteous, but as it provides by this means for the observance of the moral law among mankind. Many persons seem to think that justification before God and obedience to His law, are things unconnected with each other. But this is a mistake. The man who is justified before God and accepted with Him, will walk humbly with his God; and will of necessity and of choice seek and desire conformity to His image. It cannot possibly be otherwise; for *faith worketh by love*;⁵¹

and love produces obedience. We naturally wish to assimilate ourselves to those whom we love. If we truly love God, and have fellowship with Him, we cannot but desire to be like Him. To be perfectly conformed to Him will then be regarded as the highest bliss.

In order to the accomplishment of this under the Christian dispensation, the Spirit of God is given to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ ; and therefore the dispensation is called *the ministration of the Spirit*. The great object proposed by it is, *That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*⁵¹ in the redemption of Christ. Our Saviour therefore declared to His disciples, *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him*. The great characteristic of the ministry of the Spirit is, that He *giveth life*. He quickens the soul from that death in trespasses and sins under which mankind are held by nature, so that it is made spiritually alive to God. He convinces of sin. He applies to the heart and conscience the truths of the word of God. He comforts the mourning penitent. He sanctifies those who partake of His Divine influences, in order that their *whole spirit and soul and body* may be *preserved blameless unto the coming of our*

⁵¹ Galatians v. 6; iii. 14.

⁵² Luke xi. 13.

*Lord Jesus Christ.*⁵³ Well might the apostle say, *How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious than that which it superseded, when such benefits are conferred by its means? And these are not to be done away, but to remain permanently, for the edification and consolation of the church and people of God. The fruit of the Spirit, which is in all goodness and righteousness and truth,*⁵⁴ *is produced by those who partake of its benefits. And it is declared respecting them, There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.*⁵⁵

But the apostle speaks particularly of its being *the ministration of the Spirit*, with regard to the instruments which are employed in its promulgation. When he considered the importance of the office of the ministry of the gospel, he asked, *Who is sufficient for these things? Who is fit, who is able to speak aright the word of God, when its ministers are as to all who hear it, to the one the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life?*⁵⁶ A deep sense of his own personal insufficiency for the work of the ministry filled the mind of St. Paul. He therefore replied to the question which he put, *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. We*

⁵³ 1 Thess. v. 23. ⁵⁴ Eph. v. 9. ⁵⁵ Rom. viii. 1. ⁵⁶ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

must place our dependence upon Him alone, and seek His grace to enable us to think and speak and act aright.

That the apostle acted in this manner he intimates by saying, *Such trust have we through Christ to Godward.* His confidence was placed in God that Divine grace would be given him to fulfil the office of a minister of Christ, to which he had been appointed. It was to this grace he ascribed all the success which had attended his labours. He therefore said, *Our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament,* or rather, who hath enabled us to be such, who hath fitted or qualified us for the office, by giving to us His quickening Spirit; so that we are ministers, *not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.* The quickening influence of the Holy Spirit is needful to qualify the *ministers of the new testament* for their office, and to give them success in it. On His Divine influence and aid depends all success in the attempts of the servants of Christ to diffuse the *sweet savour of the knowledge of His name*; as well as all success in our spiritual warfare as Christians against the enemies of our souls.

As the Christian dispensation is *the ministration of the Spirit who giveth life*, we have every encouragement to seek for the help of His grace, and to depend upon receiving it. Let us with humility and fervency implore this heavenly gift,

and it will not be denied to us. It is for want of prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit that the work of God at any time seems not to make progress either in the world, or in the hearts of believers. He has declared, *I will for this be inquired of by My people to do it for them.* If earnest prayer is restrained, there can be no reason to expect the promised blessing to be received. Let us then, each for ourselves, pray earnestly that *the Spirit may be poured from on high* upon us, and upon the whole church and people of God, for the promoting of His glory, and our own edification and comfort.

It is the glory of the Christian dispensation that it is *the ministration of the Spirit.* It is this which makes it *exceed in glory* the Mosaic dispensation in a peculiar manner. It is in consequence of this that glory redounds to God and peace to man. The great privilege and benefit which it confers, are mentioned in the last verse of the chapter from which the Epistle for this day is taken. The apostle says, *We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* Communion with God and conformity to His holy image, are here pointed out to us as the great blessings to be partakers of by His grace. Let us seek to enjoy them, to our present happiness, and our eternal salvation.

SERMON XLVIII.

FOR

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ALL UNDER SIN.

Galatians iii. 22.

BUT THE SCRIPTURE HATH CONCLUDED ALL UNDER SIN, THAT THE PROMISE BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST MIGHT BE GIVEN TO THEM THAT BELIEVE.

THAT *all mankind have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*, or will fail of obtaining eternal happiness if they die in their sins, unrepented of and unpardoned, is an awful fact, which it becomes every one of us to lay seriously to heart; in order that being humbled under the mighty hand of God, as transgressors of His holy law, we may seek to be *justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*; and may obtain *the promise* of everlasting life, which is *given to them that believe* in His name.

In the chapter from which the text is taken, the apostle Paul argues that justification before God could not be obtained by means of the observance of the law of Moses, because it pronounces all those to be accursed who do not pay to it a perfect or sinless obedience. And he intimates that even under the Mosaical dispensation, the children of God looked through its types and shadows to Him who was to be *the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*; and did not expect justification by the law in the sight of God; in proof of which he quotes a passage from the prophecy of Habakkuk, where it is said, *The just shall live by faith.*⁵⁷

The Epistle for this day commences with the observation, *To Abraham and to his seed were the promises made.* The apostle had before referred to a promise made to Abraham, *In thee shall all nations be blessed.*⁵⁸ He here argues that this promise related to our Lord Jesus Christ, it being expressed in the singular number. *He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.* There is no doubt, from this remark, that Abraham so understood the promise; it having been made to him on the offering up of his son Isaac in obedience to the command of God; an offering which typified that of our Lord Jesus Christ. When God called

⁵⁷ Habakkuk ii. 4.⁵⁸ Galatians iii. 8.⁵⁹ James ii. 23.

Abraham to be His servant, and separated him from the rest of the world for this purpose, He was pleased to reveal to him the way of justification and acceptance in His sight, through a Divine Redeemer, who was to descend from his loins, or to be of his posterity. This promise of a Redeemer had been made in the first instance to our first parents, and had afterwards been confirmed to Noah. But it was subsequently limited to the posterity of Abraham, who *was called, The friend of God.*⁵⁹

The apostle refers to this limitation of the promise, in order to show that, as the covenant in which it was made was entered into several centuries before the promulgation of the law from Mount Sinai, it could not be abrogated or annulled by the Mosaical dispensation. *And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.* It was a covenant that had a promise in it respecting the coming of Christ to be the Saviour of the world; and the justification of all those who should believe in His name throughout the whole world, and in all ages, whether before or after the time of His being *manifest in the flesh*. The promise contained in this covenant could not therefore be made of no effect, by a dispensation which was designed to subsist only in the interval that was

to occur before the appearing of the Surety of this covenant. For if it were set aside, there would be an entire change manifested in the purposes of God. *For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise, but God gave it to Abraham by promise;* or, as it is said in the epistle to the Romans, *If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.* But that this is not the case, he argues, *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, before Him whom he believed, even God.*⁶⁰ The promise having been made to Abraham in a covenant which was antecedent to the giving of the law, and was in force during the Mosaic dispensation as well as before it, those only who embraced the promise, or who, under that dispensation, had faith in the Messiah to come, were accounted the children of God, and made partakers of the heavenly inheritance.

As however it might be objected, that in this case the law was of no use, or might have been dispensed with altogether, the apostle puts the question, *Wherefore then serveth the law?* What was the object proposed by it; for what purpose was it given, when salvation might be obtained through the belief of the promise before, as well as during, the Mosaical dispensation? He re-

plies, *It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made*; that the need in which mankind stood of a Divine Redeemer, might be manifested more plainly; *because the law worketh wrath, for where no law is, there is no transgression.* By means of the moral law, those to whom it was made known were informed of their duty toward God, and their duty toward their neighbour; and as they failed in their obedience to it, they were led, by means of the ceremonial law, to see their desert, as transgressors, of the death to which the victim was put; and to look forward through the appointed expiations and purifications, which were *a shadow of good things to come*,⁶¹ to the one offering of *the Lamb of God*, who by the sacrifice of Himself should *take away the sin of the world*.

This law *was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator*. St. Stephen upbraided his countrymen, because having *received the law by the disposition of angels*, they had *not kept it*; and he said of Moses, *This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received the lively oracles to give unto us*.⁶² St. Paul also calls the law, *The word spoken by angels*.⁶¹ We may understand then that Moses received the law from the angels of God, who were commissioned

⁶⁰ Rom. iv. 14, 16. ⁶¹ Heb. x. 1; ii. 2. ⁶² Acts vii. 53, 38.

to deliver it to him in Mount Sinai. But the particular object of this statement appears to be an intimation, that in all the services appointed by the ceremonial law, a mediator was necessary. It was first promulgated by means of a mediator; and no sacrifice was accepted but that which was offered up through the mediation of the priest whom God ordained to intercede with Him for the people. This mediator was necessary, because the ceremonial law was appointed for the benefit of transgressors, who in consequence of sin were cut off from communion with God. These persons could not come into the Divine presence otherwise than through a mediator Divinely appointed to offer up the sacrifices which were ordained to be made for sin. This mediator was, like the dispensation to which he belonged, a temporary one; and his mediation was to come to an end, when the promise should be fulfilled of which the Mosaic dispensation was designed to keep up the remembrance; when the great *Mediator between God and men*⁶³ should make His appearance in the world. To point out this seems to be the design of the apostle in saying, *Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one*; which means, I conceive, that a mediator was not required under one dispensation only, but in both; because He who was the Author of both the dispensations, is unchangeably one and *the same, yesterday and to-day and for ever*.⁶⁴ The

object proposed by the Mosaic dispensation was the same as that of the covenant made with Abraham. It was appointed to keep up the remembrance of the Divine promise respecting the coming of Christ, and was therefore not intended to last longer than the time when that promise should be accomplished. It was not appointed in consequence of any change in the mind of God; for *with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*⁶³ There is therefore no disagreement between the law and the promises of God, the one is not contrary to the other.

The apostle asks the question for the purpose of answering it, *Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid.* Instead of being opposed to each other, the Christian dispensation is the completion of the Mosaical. *For if there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.* The law was not intended to give life. It merely showed to man what was contrary to the mind and will of God, and forbade him to act in opposition to the will of his Creator. It was not able to quicken any from a death in trespasses and sins. It pointed out to mankind their guilt and danger as transgressors. It could not give spiritual life. It could not give justification before God. But as it is observed in the text, *The scripture hath*

⁶³ 1 Timothy ii. 5. ⁶⁴ Hebrews xiii. 8. ⁶⁵ James i. 17.

concluded all under sin. Instead of being justified by the law of Moses, mankind were condemned by it; because they fell short of obedience to its righteous requirements. It was however not intended that they should be left in this state of sin and condemnation; but that they should be led, under a sense of their failure in obedience to the law of God, to humble themselves before Him, and confess their transgressions with grief and repentance at His footstool, and implore pardoning mercy in the way which He had pointed out under the Christian dispensation, *that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.*

Let us consider more particularly the two subjects which the text presents to our view. It is said,

First, The scripture hath concluded all under sin. This is an awful fact, a fact which is calculated to fill us all with alarm, since the same scriptures also declare that *the wages of sin is death.*⁶⁶ On this subject the apostle says to the Romans, *We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.* He had proved it from matter of fact; and then shows that the scripture agreed with what he had stated, *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good,*

*no, not one.*⁶⁶ Such is the testimony of Divine revelation, not in one part only, but throughout the holy scriptures from the beginning to the end. And this testimony is confirmed by universal experience in all ages. The abounding of iniquity in the world has always been a subject of lamentation. Even the heathen writers are full of complaints of the evils which were practised among themselves. The state of mankind still continues to be the same. *The dark places of the earth, which are not enlightened with the knowledge of Divine truth, are full of the habitations of cruelty*⁶⁷ and wickedness of every description. And even where its light shines with the greatest splendour, sin in various forms is not ashamed to lift up its head with unblushing effrontery. Highly favoured as we are with religious privileges, and with having the word of God committed to our trust, yet how awfully does iniquity abound in our land. And notwithstanding our religious profession, have we not reason to abase ourselves before God, as individuals, because of the encouragement which we are disposed to give to evil thoughts and desires in our own hearts, even if the effect of them be not manifest in our conduct? It is a humiliating reflection that *all are under sin*; that sin extends its influence over the whole human race; that *the whole world lieth in wickedness.*⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Rom. vi. 23; iii. 9—12. ⁶⁷ Ps. lxxiv. 20. ⁶⁸ 1 John v. 19.

None are exempt from the charge of being sinners against God. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*⁶⁹ With what deep self-abasement does it become us, each for himself, to lay to heart this humiliating truth of the holy scriptures. Let not any presume to think lightly of sin because of its universal prevalence. It is not less hateful to God on that account. Those who excuse themselves for the commission of sin, because all are sinners, show plainly that they have no right idea of the evil of sin, as excluding all who commit it from eternal blessedness. They prove themselves to be *in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity*; and unless they *repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out,*⁷⁰ they will perish everlastingly.

At the same time it may be proper to observe, that although all sin provokes the displeasure of God, there are some sins which are of a deeper dye than others, and discover greater obduracy of heart, and denote a further progress in the career of iniquity. And so subtile are the devices of the enemy of souls, that he will endeavour to tempt men to commit greater sins, by insinuating that it cannot make much difference to what lengths they may proceed in iniquity. It is dreadful to think that any persons can be

⁶⁹ 1 John i. 8, 7. ⁷⁰ Acts viii. 23; iii. 19. ⁷¹ Psalm xix. 12-14.

so much under the power of the tempter, as to be induced to listen to such deceitful suggestions. They are however made use of by Satan to "thrust men into desperation, or into wretchedness of unclean living, not less perilous than desperation." Those who presume to act upon the assumption that it is no matter how great their sins are, because *the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin*,⁶⁹ will find that their presumption is the road to destruction. They have great need to pray that they may be delivered from this snare of the devil, that they may not be involved in his condemnation. The Psalmist prayed to God not only, *Cleanse Thou me from secret faults*, but also, *Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me*, but let me be innocent or free from great transgression.⁷¹ Heinous and open sins provoke exceedingly the wrath of God. Let us beware of the indulgence of evil thoughts and desires in our minds, lest we be fit instruments for the tempter to make use of on any occasion. Let a sense of our sinfulness humble us under the mighty hand of God. And let it be our prayer that *the words of our mouths, and the meditation of our hearts, may be acceptable in the sight of the Lord, our strength and our Redeemer*,⁷¹ our strength to enable us to resist the temptations of our spiritual enemies; and our Redeemer, to pardon all our past offences.

The scripture hath concluded all under sin, inas-much as it declares, that *all the world have become guilty before God*, that *all have sinned*; and as the consequence of sin, have *come short of*, or cannot attain to, *the glory of God*.⁷² Sin cuts off from communion with God on earth, and from the glory of God hereafter; for into the abode of the blessed *there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth*.⁷³ But although all mankind, as sinners, have forfeited the favour of God and eternal happiness; so that none can claim these blessings on account of any thing that they have done or can do of themselves; yet, blessed be God, this declaration is not made to shut us up in despair, but in order to lead the children of men to humble themselves before Him, and earnestly to seek for the pardon of their sins, and reconciliation with God, that they may be delivered from the awful consequences of sin both here and hereafter. The text states,

Secondly, The object proposed by the awful declaration made in it respecting the condition of mankind, that they are *all under sin*. This is, *That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe*. The promise here spoken of is that of justification before God; *that we might be justified by faith, even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righte-*

⁷² Romans iii. 19, 23.

⁷³ Revelation xxi. 27.

ousness ; of the gift of the Holy Spirit, *that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith* ; and of eternal blessedness through Him, of whom it was said, *In Him shall all nations be blessed*. As the apostle argues : *So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*⁷⁴ The scripture contains a promise of justification before God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to sinners who believe in Him. This is a promise of pardon for sins past, of deliverance from the power and dominion of sin for the future, and of acceptance in the presence of the infinitely holy Lord God Almighty. With what gratitude of heart should we sinners embrace this promise. When we were shut up under sin, God was pleased to make it on our behalf. He of His infinite compassion provided the means of pardon. He sent *His only begotten Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins, that we might live through Him* ;⁷⁵ that our sins might be pardoned through faith in His atoning blood ; that we might be delivered from the power and dominion of those sins under which we were held ; that we might be reconciled to God by the death of His Son ; might be accepted in His presence ; might be accounted righteous before Him ; might

⁷⁴ Galatians iii. 6, 14, 8, 9, 29.

⁷⁵ 1 John iv. 9, 10.

be at peace with Him ; might enjoy His favour and friendship ; His blessing and protection ; the teaching and guidance and consolations of His Holy Spirit ; with every needful blessing both temporal and spiritual for this life, and a hope full of glory and immortality for the life to come ; a promise of eternal blessedness when time shall be no more, for ever and ever. What can be desired more than these things which God has graciously promised to give, through Jesus Christ, to the sinful children of men. *He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*⁷⁶ In Christ Jesus there is pardon for the guilty, repentance for the transgressor, righteousness for the unrighteous, sanctification for the disobedient and unholy, salvation for the lost ; all bestowed by faith, or upon them that believe in Him. There is no difference in this respect between one and another. *All have sinned*, and therefore all must be saved in this way, or they will perish everlastingly. Sinners of all descriptions are therefore called upon to believe and live, to *turn unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon them, and abundantly pardon them.*⁷⁷ To all who truly turn to Him, the Lord our God is gracious and merciful. None seek His face in vain, who seek Him with their whole hearts.

⁷⁶ Romans viii. 32.⁷⁷ Isaiah lv. 7.⁷⁸ 2 Peter i. 4.

When they draw near to the throne of grace through our Divine Mediator and Advocate and Intercessor, who appeareth in the presence of God for His believing people, to plead their cause, and to bestow the richest blessings of His grace upon them, they cannot wait upon Him in vain. The promises of God in Christ Jesus are *exceeding great and precious promises*.⁷⁸ The promise here spoken of refers to all the benefits which He came into the world to bestow upon the sinful children of men; and it is made and will be fulfilled *to all that believe*.

We see then how full the promise is, and how extensive the invitation to partake of the blessedness which it sets before us. Let us ask ourselves, What is our state with regard to the declaration made in the text? Are we among those who with the heart believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek for the fulfilment of this promise to their own souls? *Christ hath redeemed us, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*. Is the fulfilment of this promise the subject of our humble and earnest supplication to God? Do we pray that we may be influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God continually; that He would dwell in us and walk in us, or be with us at all times, whether we are at home or abroad, wherever we are; that we may be pleasing to Him in soul and body, in our spirit and our conduct; and His

holy name may be glorified in us and by us continually? *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*; he does not belong to Christ; he is not a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus, let his religious profession be what it may. *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they, and they only, are the sons of God.*⁷⁹ *They are washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, and they shall inherit the kingdom of God;*⁸⁰ not for their own righteousness' sake, but for His merits in whom they put their trust. Let us lay hold of the promises of God, that the blessedness which they set before us may be ours in time and in eternity. Let us seek to know and love and serve Him, who is the hope of His believing people. Let us not be ashamed to hold fast our profession of attachment to Christ and His cause. Let us consider what great things He has done for us, that we may be more deeply sensible of our obligations to Him. Let us meditate upon what He has promised to do for His people, that we may place our confidence in Him; and may find that He is both able and willing to do for us, *exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think*;⁸¹ that He will *supply all our need according to His riches in glory*,⁸² until mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and we shall be ever with the Lord.

⁷⁹ Rom. viii. 9, 14. ⁸⁰ 1 Cor. vi. 11, 10. ⁸¹ Eph. iii. 20. ⁸² Phil. iv. 19.

SERMON XLIX.

FOR

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT.

Galatians v. 16.

THIS I SAY THEN, WALK IN THE SPIRIT, AND
YE SHALL NOT FULFIL THE LUSTS OF THE
FLESH.

THAT man is of his own nature inclined to evil, is the doctrine of our church, derived from the holy scriptures and confirmed by universal experience. This however forms no excuse for sin, does not lessen its criminality, and will not avert or diminish its punishment. The transgressor of the law of God is in a most awful state, for while he is living in sin, he is bringing down upon himself the Divine judgments, which impend over him. The restraints of education and the laws of society in a civilized and Christian country may, in some measure, counteract the

evil propensities of our fallen nature; but nothing will really succeed in curbing the passions of the human mind, except the continual influence of the Holy Spirit, which we must call for by diligent prayer, if we would obtain it. This is intimated in the text; in which also the two subjects mentioned in the Epistle for this day are spoken of. We may inquire,

First, What is it to fulfil the lusts of the flesh?
and

Secondly, What is it to walk in the Spirit?

And may the blessing of the Holy Spirit be vouchsafed to us while we review the topics here brought to our notice, that we may be led, by the influence of His grace upon our souls, to turn from every evil way.

It was said by our Lord Jesus Christ, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh*; that is, as we come into the world, we are by nature corrupt and depraved; and therefore, *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*⁸³ In consequence of being born of the flesh, or being shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin,⁸⁴ our natural inclination is to do the works of the devil; and we as naturally dislike spiritual things. The apostle therefore says, respecting believers in Christ, *The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the*

⁸³ John iii. 6, 5.

⁸⁴ Psalm li. 5.

flesh ; and these are contrary the one to the other ; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. The desires of the flesh are of an opposite kind to those which proceed from the Spirit of God. In the Christian these two opposite principles are continually striving for the mastery ; and accordingly as Divine grace is sought or not, the one or the other usually prevails. The will of the new mind is to please God ; the will of the natural mind is to live in forgetfulness of God, and in disobedience to His holy commandments. The believer in Christ, being *renewed in the spirit of his mind*,⁸⁵ is desirous to do in all things that which is pleasing to God, but he finds a principle within him, *that when he would do good, evil is present with him*,⁸⁶ and therefore he *cannot do the things that he would.*

But there are many deeds of persons who are *in the flesh*, or living entirely under the influence of their animal nature, which do not mark them out particularly as the children of the wicked one. The apostle therefore describes those works of the flesh which are plainly such, and the habitual practice of which affords full proof that those who are occupied in them are not the children of God ; because they who commit such things as are here specified are living in opposition to His word and will, in evident disobedience to

⁸⁵ Ephesians iv. 23.

⁸⁶ Romans vii. 21.

His holy laws. And here he enumerates not only the deeds of the body, but also the dispositions of the mind. He speaks of vice in its various stages and degrees; its conception in the heart, as well as its appearance in the life. *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.* These are manifestly the works of the flesh. They are first mentioned because these sins strike at the root of all the bonds of society; they destroy all relative affections and relative duties; and make those who are under their influence more *like the beasts that perish*,⁸⁷ than like rational beings. Therefore we see how great is the displeasure of God against these crimes. They were the occasion of the destruction of the old world by a flood; giants in wickedness being the product of the unlawful and abominable connexion of the sons of God with the daughters of men. Sins of this description were also the occasion of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire; and these sins will occasion the dissolution of the world which we now inhabit, that *the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up*.⁸⁸ It is grievous to think that in a country called Christian, such vices should flourish so luxuriantly as they do; that people should live in the practice of these crimes, and yet imagine themselves to be Chris-

⁸⁷ Psalm xlix. 20. ⁸⁸ 2 Peter iii. 10. ⁸⁹ Eph. v. 6.

tians, notwithstanding they are told plainly that these sins will effectually exclude them from heaven, and shut them up in the regions of darkness, of misery and despair, for ever. How frequently is this declared in the writings of the apostles in the most forcible manner. The awful consequences of these sins cannot be too strongly stated. How awful is the admonition, that *because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*⁸⁹

Closely allied to these sins, in the days of the apostles, and ever since in heathen lands, (and it may be added also in Popish countries, where the church of Rome maintains the ascendancy,) are *idolatry* and *witchcraft*, or sorcery. The worship of idols has always been accompanied with the most abominable impieties. And to aid the delusion, sorceries or enchantments, magical tricks or incantations, were used; like those which are exhibited in Popish countries to this day; such as the pretended liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, at Naples. The evils which attended idolatry among the Israelites, and the Divine judgments denounced against it, are frequently referred to in the writings of the prophets, and in the history of the kings of Israel.

To these dreadful crimes the apostle adds another class of sins which are not regarded by many professors of religion as having such evil

consequences attached to them, as the apostle here speaks of. *Hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings.* *Emulations* are said to mean giving way to passionate tempers; and *seditions*, to refer particularly to divisions or separations. The indulgence of these dispositions of mind, or yielding to these evil tempers, is most displeasing to God, however lightly they may be thought of by those who are in the habit of suffering themselves to be carried away by them. They come under the same condemnation as the grosser sins which were first enumerated. Pride seems to be at the root of these evils, as sensuality was of the preceding. Perhaps to the indulgence of one or the other of these evil principles, all wickedness may be traced. He who is influenced by the former, is living in a state of independence of God and contempt of His authority; like *the fool* that saith in his heart, *There is no God,*⁹⁰ whom I am bound to worship and obey. The latter character is in close alliance with the prince of darkness, whose works are practised. We may observe here also, that making divisions in the church of Christ, though it may be esteemed a matter of no importance by many persons, as well as sedition against the state, which is comprehended in the same term, is classed among those things which are manifestly *the works of the flesh.*

To this black catalogue the apostle adds, *murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*. All kinds of licentious excesses manifest that the persons who commit them are living under the dominion of *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*; and that they are *the children of wrath*,⁹¹ who *after their hardness and impenitent hearts are treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds*,⁹² so that they are in the utmost danger of being *cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*,⁹³ unavailing misery, anguish, and despair, throughout eternity.

The apostle solemnly declares respecting these evil practices, *Of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. Oh! what need have those who indulge evil tempers, and those who pursue vicious courses, and adopt wicked practices, to consider their ways; since the path in which they are going is that which leadeth to destruction; and therefore except they repent, and turn from their evil ways, they will perish everlastingly. They are walking in a way of which it is said, *Whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace*; for there is no

⁹⁰ Psalm xiv. 1. ⁹¹ Eph. ii. 2, 3. ⁹² Rom. ii. 5, 6. ⁹³ Matt. xxii. 13.

*peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.*⁹⁴ The apostle proposes in the text a remedy for these evils, the only one which is effectual for the purpose of counteracting them. *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.* Let us inquire,

Secondly, What it is to walk in the Spirit. It is called, in the eighteenth verse, being *led by the Spirit*, which means being influenced and directed by the Spirit of God to think and to do those things which are pleasing in His sight. The apostle says to the Romans, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* And how they are led appears by the declaration, *If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*⁹⁵ And here he observes, *The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.* The desires of the Spirit are opposed to those of the flesh, and therefore it is said, *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.* By the true Christian all that the natural sensual inclinations of mankind desire or take pleasure in is mortified and opposed. He regards sin as a cursed thing, which must be crucified, or put to a lingering death, though it will continue to exist in him as long as he is in the body, and will sometimes even seem to revive

⁹⁴ Isaiah lix. 8; xlviii. 22.

⁹⁵ Romans viii. 14, 13.

and make a vigorous effort to regain the ascendancy. The internal warfare of the flesh and the Spirit often occasions disquietude to his mind, lest he should fall under the power of his spiritual enemies, and bring distress into his conscience, and disgrace upon his profession and the cause of God. But those who, in obedience to the command of Christ, *Watch and pray* lest they *enter into temptation*, knowing that *the flesh is weak*, will ever obtain that Divine aid which they need to enable them to withstand the enemies of their souls' peace and safety. When we seek for the help of the Lord against the mighty power of Satan and his angels, for the Spirit to help us in our weakness, to come to our succour in the time of our need, no enemy shall prevail against us. We shall be enabled to triumph through Christ who strengtheneth us, and to give thanks unto God for His gracious interference on our behalf.

But God is pleased to direct the means to be used in order to the attainment of the end, that we may be sensible that it is not by our own might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, that the powers of darkness are discomfited and put to flight. Of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ it is said, *If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law*; that is, they are delivered from its curse and condemnation; for *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a*

*curse for us;*⁹⁶ *and there is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* For although they are exposed to temptation, and liable to be overtaken by sin, yet it *shall not have dominion over them, because they are under grace, which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord; and therefore, being justified by faith, they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁹⁷ Those who walk in the Spirit and are led by the Spirit, will produce the fruit of the Spirit. What this is the apostle states, as contrasted with the works of the flesh. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*

The first of these fruits is love. *Faith worketh by love.* Love to God is produced in the heart in consequence of His love being experienced in it. *We love Him because He first loved us; and we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.*⁹⁸ *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.*⁹⁷ This love is the cause of all holy obedience to the will of God. *If a man love Me,* said our blessed Saviour, *he will keep my words;* and this love is therefore described as *the fulfilling of the law.* He who truly loves God in his heart, will desire and endeavour to pay a reverential regard and

⁹⁶ Gal. iii. 13. ⁹⁷ Rom. viii. 1; vi. 14; v. 21, 1, 5. ⁹⁸ 1 John iv. 19, 16.

obedience to the duties of both the first and the second table of the law, his duty toward God, and his duty toward his neighbour. Love will make that pleasant which would otherwise be opposed to his natural inclinations. He will desire to love God above all things. He will pray that he may be enabled to love Him with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, so as to seek his happiness in the enjoyment of the favour of God. He will live as seeing Him who is invisible. He will consider himself as at all times in the presence of God. He will not imagine it needful to have inferior beings to mediate with God on his behalf or to pray for him, as the Romish church impiously directs her votaries to seek to departed spirits for this purpose, thus setting up strange gods and inferior beings as the object of worship. God is a Spirit who fills heaven and earth with His presence; whose eyes behold and whose eyelids try the children of men; who *searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.*⁹⁹ This cannot be said of any created being. It is therefore the greatest impiety for human creatures to address angels or departed spirits, since it is not possible to have any communion or fellowship with them. It is a violation of the first commandment to do any thing of the kind. It is still more gross impiety to set up images to bow down to, as representations of God or of any creature, as the

Romish church does, in defiance of the second commandment. He who has the love of God in his heart will avoid every thing of the kind. He knows that *there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all,*¹ and therefore he draws nigh with confidence to the throne of grace, through the merits and mediation of his Divine Redeemer, that *in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, he may make known his requests unto God by Christ Jesus,*² and may be assured of obtaining an answer of peace. He who loves God will reverence His name, and not profane it or take it in vain. He will reverence His sabbaths as days of sacred rest, to be employed in the worship and contemplation of Him in whom he lives and moves and has his being. He will love the worship and ordinances of God, because in them the Lord has graciously promised to come unto His people, and to bless them. And he will seek Divine grace to enable him to deny himself with regard to that selfishness of disposition, which naturally prevents man from loving his neighbour as himself. Love to God and man, or obedience to the first and great commandment, and to the second which is like unto it, is the first *fruit of the Spirit*.

From thence proceeds *joy*, real abiding joy of

⁹⁹ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. ¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. ² Phil. iv. 6.

heart. True religion is not that gloomy thing which some people falsely imagine it to be. It produces *fulness of joy*. The apostle says, *We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement,*³ or reconciliation with God. A pardoned sinner has real cause for rejoicing. He who is justified before God by faith in Christ Jesus, and has peace with God, and is living in a state of acceptance with Him, has *joy and peace in believing*. The joy of the worldling is like *the crackling of thorns under a pot,*⁴ which make a great blaze and noise for a short time, but are soon consumed and turned into darkness. The joy of the Christian is abiding, it will know no end, it will issue in pleasures for evermore. It ought therefore to make him of a cheerful countenance. The Psalmist could say, *My soul shall be joyful in the Lord, it shall rejoice in His salvation.*⁵ The loving-kindness of the Lord to His people, and the blessedness which He has promised to bestow upon them, are subjects of continual rejoicing. The people of God are therefore exhorted to rejoice in Him, because *the joy of the Lord is their strength.*⁶ It is a means of encouraging them to press forward in the narrow way to the kingdom of heaven, to *fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life whereunto they are called.*⁷ The

³ Rom. v. 11. ⁴ Eccles. vii. 6. ⁵ Psalm xxxv. 9. ⁶ Neh. viii. 10.

apostle exhorts, *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice*; and he describes Christians as those who *worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*⁸ It is the privilege of the humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, to rejoice and be glad all the days of his life, because of the goodness and mercy of which he is a partaker from his heavenly Father. Thus he is to manifest his gratitude for the blessings which have been bestowed upon him, and his confidence that all the promises of God in Christ Jesus will be made good to him in his eternal salvation.

Peace is an attendant on the joy of the true Christian. He has *peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus.*⁹ Knowing that his Redeemer has *made peace through the blood of His cross,*⁹ he walks with God, who fills him *with all joy and peace in believing.* And having this peace of God in his conscience, he endeavours, *if it be possible, as much as lieth in him, to live peaceably with all men.*¹⁰ It is the privilege of the believer in Christ to enjoy these blessings. They are the genuine fruits of a living faith in the Son of God. Having the love of God in his heart, the joy of the Lord in his soul, the peace of God in his conscience, he

⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 12. ⁸ Phil. iv. 4, 7; iii. 3. ⁹ Col. i. 20. ¹⁰ Rom. xv. 13; xii. 18.

is enabled to exhibit in his conduct to those with whom he has intercourse, *longsuffering*, or patience, to bear and forbear with them. The patience which has been exercised towards him by his heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, of which he is deeply sensible, makes him desirous to imitate it in his conduct towards others. He manifests also *gentleness*, or benevolence. The true Christian is the true philanthropist. He shows also *goodness*; or *whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report*,¹¹ virtuous, and praiseworthy, he thinks on these things and does them. His deportment also exhibits *faith*, or fidelity, *meekness*, and mildness of behaviour, *temperance*, and moderation; restraining his unruly passions, which he seeks for Divine grace to enable him to do, when they would break out in opposition to the word and will of God. Thus as the apostle observes, *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts. They not only mortify the members of the earth*,¹² but those affections and desires which would draw away their hearts from God. They not only *present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*,¹³ but it is their earnest prayer that their *whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*; ¹⁴ that He may be the supreme object

¹¹ Phil. iv. 8. ¹² Col. iii. 5. ¹³ Rom. xii. 1. ¹⁴ 1 Thess. v. 23.

of their affection, and their thoughts and desires may be pleasing to Him, as well as their words and their actions. They *deny* themselves, *and take up their cross, and follow*¹⁵ Christ, as *all* their *salvation and all* their *desire*.

These fruits of the Spirit, which are produced by the true believer in the Lord Jesus, are not contrary, but agreeable to the law of God. *Against such there is no law.* They who, through Divine grace, are *filled with these fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God*,¹⁶ take the moral law for the rule of their conduct, and desire to live according to its directions, which they implore the help of the Spirit of God to enable them to do. So that *walking in the Spirit* is receiving Divine strength to do that which is pleasing in the sight of God, and agreeable to His commandments, His holy, just, and good law. It is thus only that any of the fallen race of Adam can act according to what God has commanded us for our good. Let us seek grace from God to enable us to *walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*, that we may receive His blessing both in this life, and in that which is to come.

¹⁵ Matthew xvi. 24.

¹⁶ Philippians i. 11.

SERMON L.

FOR

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

Galatians vi. 14.

BUT GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY,
SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS
CHRIST, BY WHOM THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED
UNTO ME, AND I UNTO THE WORLD.

IN the Epistle for this day, the apostle Paul sums up the whole argument of his epistle to the Galatians. He had written to them for the purpose of warning the Christian church against *certain men which came down from Judea, and taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.* These men endeavoured to graft Judaism upon Christianity, in order to gain to themselves credit among their countrymen by their zeal for the law of Moses. But while they did this, they subverted the souls of those who had received the

gospel of Christ. The apostle shows the great concern that he felt for the persons to whom his ministry had been useful, his anxiety to prevent them from being deceived by false teachers to the disquietude of their minds, and the hindrance of their salvation. He therefore took the trouble of writing to them a long letter with his own hand. *Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.* This appears to have been a considerable undertaking for him, as he usually employed some other person to write what he dictated, and merely wrote with his own hand the salutation at the end of it, as a token of its genuineness. He concludes the second epistle to the Thessalonians with this statement: *The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle; so I write.* His salutation consisted in the words, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*¹⁷ With a prayer for this best of blessings to be vouchsafed to the church of Christ, St. Paul always concluded his epistles. The person whom he employed to write the epistle to the Romans, makes mention of himself as having been engaged in the work. *I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.*¹⁸ It seems as if none of those who were accustomed to write for the apostle were then with him; and therefore he

¹⁷ 2 Thess. iii. 17, 18. ¹⁸ Rom. xvi. 22. ¹⁹ Gal. v. 3.

wrote himself, *with his own hand*; and gave thereby a great proof of his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of the church in Galatia.

Having thus shown his affectionate concern for them, he again warns them against the false teachers, who were not only endeavouring to undermine his credit with them, but, what was of infinitely greater consequence, were putting a stumbling block in their way for the subversion of their souls. He exposes the base motives which actuated the conduct of these men. *As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.* These men seem to have been convinced of the truth of Christianity, but they wished to avoid the persecution which in those days followed the open profession of it. They were desirous of appearing in the eyes of their countrymen as persons who were anxious to make proselytes to Judaism; that they might be honoured by them, instead of suffering reproach as Christians. The apostle shows that these men who were so zealous for the law, or in the cause of circumcision, were not themselves the better for having been brought under its yoke; *for neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law*; although by submitting to that ordinance, they were *debtors to do the whole law*.¹⁹ This being the case, they were exposed to its curse for disobedience, by

the engagement into which they had entered, instead of deriving any benefit from it. Their own glory was all their end and aim in preaching up circumcision. *They desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.* They wished to boast of having persuaded a number of Gentiles to embrace the Jewish religion, and submit to its initiatory rite.

This leads the apostle to make a noble confession of his faith and his only ground of glorying, in the text, to which our attention is to be more particularly directed. He gloried in the cross of Christ alone, in salvation through the crucified Redeemer. For the sake of proclaiming throughout the world pardon and salvation through the blood of the Lamb of God, he was willing to *labour and suffer reproach.*²⁰ While these men were anxious only to obtain the applause of their countrymen, he was contented to meet the scorn and obloquy of the world, as a follower of Christ. While their object was to gain proselytes for their own honour, his was to gain souls for the honour of his Lord and Master. They desired to make men change their outward profession of religion; he was anxious for them to become *new creatures*. If this took place, if their hearts were changed, and their lives testified it by a consistency of conduct accompanying that change, it was no matter to him whether they were circumcised or not. *For in Christ Jesus neither*

circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. If they were new creatures in Christ Jesus, if *old things* were *passed away* and *all things* had become new; and *all things* were of God, who had reconciled them to Himself by Jesus Christ,²¹ this was the change that was most needful to take place. Circumcision could then do them no good, and uncircumcision would do them no harm. Jews and Gentiles were equally welcome to receive from Jesus Christ the blessings which He freely bestows upon all that truly turn to Him.

And therefore the apostle prayed for all such persons, *As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.* The rule of the word of God was that which he was desirous to have followed; and this is, that those who believe in Christ should be new creatures, and as such, *careful to maintain good works, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things;*²² that as those who are not their own, but are bought with a price, that of the precious blood of Christ, they may glorify God in their body and in their spirit, which are God's.²³ That these persons might enjoy peace with God in their consciences, through the peace-speaking blood of Jesus Christ; and have a continual sense of His pardoning mercy, and their reconciliation to Him, was the subject of the

²⁰1 Tim. iv. 10. ²¹2 Cor. v. 17, 18. ²²Titus iii. 8; ii. 10. ²³1 Cor. vi. 20.

apostle's fervent supplications on their behalf. And that these blessings might also be vouchsafed to the Israel of God, to the circumcised descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, as well as to Gentile believers in Christ. While the apostle earnestly contended against the Gentiles being brought under the yoke of the law of Moses, his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be saved;²⁴ and he regarded those among them who were truly the children of God with peculiar interest and affection, as his brethren in the flesh as well as in the Lord.

But as he had met with great opposition and persecution from his own countrymen; and as the false teachers who had endeavoured to subvert the souls of the Galatians would, he knew, be greatly displeased at his exposure of their unworthy motives for inculcating the necessity of circumcision upon the Gentiles; he adds, *From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.* He had suffered before and been shamefully entreated;²⁵ he had been repeatedly scourged both by Jews and Gentiles, he had been stoned and left for dead. His body retained the marks of the injuries that he had received on these occasions, while he was engaged in the service of Christ, to make known His great salvation to his perishing fellow sinners. He did not however repent of what he had done,

notwithstanding the persecution and suffering that it had brought upon him. He was still willing to *endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*²⁶ Although he had received many a wound in the conflict in which he had been engaged, he was resolved still to continue his warfare against the powers of darkness, under the banner of the Captain of his salvation; and to endeavour to deliver the prey out of the hand of the spoiler. As an old soldier in a good cause, under a good sovereign, he was not ashamed of his wounds, nor afraid to meet even death itself in the fight. He was determined to persevere to the end undauntedly, to *be faithful unto death*, knowing that he should then receive the *crown of life.*²⁷ And therefore those who opposed him might be assured that the trouble which they endeavoured to bring upon him would be to no purpose, it would not divert him from the cause which he was pursuing; on which account he advises them, for their own sakes, to trouble him no further by attempting to make divisions in the church of Christ.

He concludes his epistle with his customary prayer: *Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.* This brings the greatest happiness that the soul of man is

²⁴ Rom. x. 1. ²⁵ 2 Thess. ii. 2. ²⁶ 2 Tim. ii. 10. ²⁷ Rev. ii. 10.

capable of possessing. To have the spirit of the mind influenced from above by Divine grace, so as to *have the mind of Christ*, the same mind that was in Him; to have the spirit raised to things above, and the affections set upon them, is indeed a source of joy unspeakable and full of glory. May this blessedness be our portion. Let us seek to enjoy it, that we may be happy in the knowledge and love of God on earth, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God hereafter.

Having taken this cursory view of the Epistle for this day, let us now consider more particularly the verse which has been selected for the text. It contains,

First, The ground of the apostle's glorying; and

Secondly, The consequences of his making this profession.

May we be led by the consideration of it to adopt the same language for ourselves, and enjoy the blessedness resulting from it.

First, The apostle declared, *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. It need scarcely be observed, that the apostle did not mean to glory in the cross of wood upon which our blessed Saviour suffered death. But so many marvellous stories have been circulated by members of the Romish church, respecting the virtues of what they call pieces of the true cross, that it is evident there

is no opinion too absurd to be adopted by the superstitious. The apostle had no veneration for relics of this description. Had the wood of the cross been presented to him as an object worthy of his veneration, he would doubtless have done with it as Hezekiah did with *the brazen serpent* to which the children of Israel burnt incense; to whose honour it is recorded that *he brake it in pieces, and he called it Nehushtan*, or said it was merely *a piece of brass*,²⁸ and therefore should have no Divine honours paid to it. It is awful to see what *fables* they will turn to who *turn away their ears from hearing the truth* of God.²⁹ What indignation would have fired the mind of St. Paul, if he could have imagined that his words would be tortured to so base a meaning, as that he gloried in a piece of wood!

He has himself explained the meaning of this expression in other epistles. In the first chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, he says that *Christ sent him to preach the gospel*; this he then terms *the preaching of the cross*; and after declares, *We preach Christ crucified*.³⁰ In the epistle to the Ephesians, he speaks of Christ reconciling us *unto God by the cross*.³⁴ And to the Colossians he states, that He *made peace through the blood of His cross*.³¹ By glorying in the cross of Christ then, the apostle meant to express his

²⁸ 2 Kings xviii. 4. ²⁹ 2 Tim. iv. 4. ³⁰ 1 Cor. i. 17, 18, 23. ³¹ Col. i. 20.

dependence upon the obedience unto death of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only foundation of hope to guilty sinners for the pardon of their sins, for reconciliation to God, and the enjoyment of His favour, and for everlasting salvation. His suffering on the cross was the consummation of that work, for the accomplishment of which our adorable Redeemer came upon earth; and therefore the mention of it was designed to express all that He did and suffered "for us men and for our salvation." By *the cross of Christ* then, we are to understand the apostle to mean the crucifixion and death of the Lord and Saviour, or His dying upon the cross as the substitute for the guilty transgressors of the law of God; His *putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*,³² so that by means of His death upon the cross, it was manifested that *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: for He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*³³

In this doctrine of *the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, or of God's method of pardoning sin through the propitiation of Christ, the apostle gloried. This was the great subject of his ministry. He continually proclaimed that in Christ we sinners *have redemption through His blood, the*

³² Heb. ix. 26. ³³ 2 Cor. v. 19, 21. ³⁴ Eph. i. 7, 8; ii. 16.

*forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded towards us.*³⁴ In the doctrine of the pardon of sin through the blood-shedding and death of the Son of God, he made his boast. The knowledge of this was his greatest joy. The manner in which he speaks of it shows his earnestness on the subject. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*; it being the source of the richest blessings to the children of men. If we have right views of the subject, it will be the delightful theme of our rejoicing also. We shall meditate upon it with gratitude of heart. We shall rejoice in the benefits that are derived from it; and partaking of them ourselves, we shall be ready and desirous to recommend it to others, as a sovereign remedy for all the evils of this life, that they may be blessed also. But, alas! how little is this important and heavenly doctrine understood, notwithstanding the general profession which is made of the knowledge of Christianity. How few are those who enjoy the comfort that is to be received from *the cross of Christ*, or by means of a simple reliance upon His blood-shedding and death for their pardon and reconciliation with God. How few *walk humbly with their God*, trusting in the merits of their Redeemer as the only ground of their confidence for acceptance in His presence. How few *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*, as it is the privilege of be-

lievers in Christ to do day by day. Whilst Christianity is professed, its principles are not understood, its blessings are not sought; our need of them for our present comfort, as well as for eternal happiness, is not perceived; and therefore they are disregarded. The perishing things of this life are esteemed of greater value and importance than the invisible and eternal things of the life to come. Thus Satan deceives the human race, and persuades them to barter heaven for earth, to be careless and secure with regard to their eternal state, that he may exult in their destruction.

But we may learn from the apostle's earnestness on this subject, that it is not a matter of indifference whether *the cross of Christ* be our hope and our glorying or not. If our immortal souls be saved, it must be through faith in the blood-shedding and death of Christ on the cross. We must, as guilty sinners, implore pardon for His sake who shed His blood for transgressors; and the benefits of His death and passion must be applied to our consciences by a living faith in the Son of God. Thus only shall we be able really to enter into the meaning of the apostle's expression, with feelings in some measure corresponding to his on this most important subject. And thus we may expect that the *God of hope* will *fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

But at the same time, joyful as this theme will be to our souls, we shall find that the same result will follow from our profession of it and glorying in it, as the apostle experienced. He found that the gospel of Christ, which brought such peace and blessedness to his soul, that he was anxious to communicate it to all around him, in order that they might partake of its consolations, was not acceptable to the world, but met with the most determined opposition and hostility. He speaks,

Secondly, Of the consequence to himself of his glorying in the cross of Christ: *By whom* (or *whereby*, according to the marginal reading) *the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* This implied that before he was made acquainted with the doctrine of *the cross of Christ*, or of salvation through Him, he was alive to all the pleasures of the world. But when his heart had been given up to Christ, he no longer sought his happiness in them; the love of the world no longer possessed his mind. Its friendship and its applause were no longer the objects of his pursuit. Its follies and its vices were renounced and abhorred, as opposed to the will of God.

But what do we generally understand by *the world*? What is it that the children of men are seeking for in it with the utmost ardour? Its riches, its honours, its pleasures. In these respects the world was crucified to the apostle.

He sought not his happiness in them ; he coveted them not ; he was willing to forego them all for Christ's sake. And it was not an empty boast that he made in this matter ; for he was actually put to the test. And then he could say, *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things ; and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.* To secure the eternal salvation of his immortal soul, which was to be obtained only by faith in Christ, was his great object ; and for this he cheerfully renounced the world, and all the pleasures and gratifications which it presents to the carnal mind. It was by the cross of Christ that the world was crucified to him.

We may learn from his example in what manner the temptations of the world are to be resisted by us also. When they present themselves to us, let us look at the cross of Christ. Let us consider the cause of all His sufferings, and ask ourselves, Did sin cause Him all that anguish and woe which He endured, and shall we consider it to be a light thing ? Did He suffer for sin, and shall we wantonly commit it ? Let us call to mind His agony and pain, that we may dread sin, and may love Him above all things, *who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to*

the will of God and our Father. What horror and dread of sin, and what love to our adorable Redeemer, is a view by faith of Christ on the cross, suffering *for sin, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*, calculated to produce. Let us contemplate it for this purpose.

But further, the apostle says that he was *crucified unto the world*. In consequence of his glorying in the cross of Christ, the world looked on him with the contempt with which they regarded a crucified malefactor; and treated him in like manner as Christ was treated on the cross, with scorn and derision. With what contumely was our adorable Redeemer regarded when He was *made a curse for us!* Similar was the treatment which the apostle met with from the ungodly world. He speaks to the Corinthians of being *reviled and persecuted and defamed*; and adds, *We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.* The humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ needs not to be surprised if at any time he should find himself exposed to the scorn and enmity of the children of this world. St. Paul asserts that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* Opposition will always subsist between *him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not*, between the children of God and the men of the world.

But will the Christian return *evil for evil, and*

railing for railing? By no means. Here our Saviour has left us an example, that we should follow His steps; who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. Instead of threatening, He prayed for His murderers, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* How different was the conduct of Christ on the cross towards the world, from that of the world towards Him. His heart was full of compassion for the children of men. Their hearts were full of enmity to Him. While Christ on the cross was an object of horror and abhorrence to the world, the world was an object of pity and compassion to our crucified Redeemer. This distinction of spirit and temper will always subsist between the true Christian and the worldling. The world hates the Christian; the Christian compassionates the state of *the world that lieth in wickedness.* He desires to promote the eternal salvation of all around him. Let us follow the example of Christ, and cleave to His cross as our only hope; and, while we *name the name of Christ*, let us also be careful to *depart from all iniquity.* Let us *by well doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, who speak evil of the children of God: and let us look forward to that crown of glory which He has graciously promised to give to them that believe in Him, who love and fear His holy name.

SERMON LI.

FOR

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

PRAYER AND PRAISE.

Ephesians iii. 20, 21.

NOW UNTO HIM THAT IS ABLE TO DO EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY ABOVE ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US, UNTO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH BY CHRIST JESUS, THROUGHOUT ALL AGES, WORLD WITHOUT END. AMEN.

THE Epistle for this day commences with a reference made by the apostle Paul to the tribulations or afflictions which he suffered as a minister of Christ, when he went forth in his Master's name to declare the gospel of His grace to his perishing fellow sinners. The apostle had met with great opposition at Ephesus, of which an account is given in the nineteenth chapter of the

Acts of the Apostles; and to which he is also supposed to refer when he said to Timothy, *Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord will reward him according to his works; of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.*³⁵ At the time when he wrote this epistle, he called himself *the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles*, or in consequence of his preaching to them the gospel, that he might be the instrument of bringing salvation to their souls. But he rejoiced in his affliction that *the word of God was not bound.*³⁵ It might still go forth, and be the cause of unspeakable blessings to mankind. But as he was in affliction for their sakes, they were greatly concerned about it. They sympathised with him in his sufferings, and were deeply grieved at his being called to endure them.

He therefore exhorts them, *I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.* Instead of being distressed, he rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the name³⁶ of Christ; and he called upon them to rejoice with him, because his afflictions led him to the throne of grace, where he humbly and earnestly pleaded for their spiritual welfare.

He speaks of the manner in which he was accustomed to pray for them. *For this cause I bow*

³⁵ 2 Tim. iv. 14, 15; ii. 9.

³⁶ Acts v. 41.

my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His posture in prayer denoted the humility with which he made his supplications. However unimportant it may seem to some persons, a reverential posture becomes us in the presence of God. If angels veil their faces, we may well *worship and bow down and kneel before the Lord our Maker.*³⁷ The worship of the heart is to be accompanied with the worship of the body. This is not a matter of indifference, or the apostle would not have mentioned his own practice. He doubtless stated it for the purpose of leading them to follow his example.

He prayed to *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* It is in this character that we are to look up to God, when we approach the throne of grace. We are to call upon Him as *our Father* who is *in heaven*,³⁸ with heartfelt gratitude that He is pleased to make Himself known to us, the sinful children of men, in the character of a kind and tender parent. But the only way in which we can behold Him in this gracious character is through *our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.* The whole family of God are His *children by faith in Christ Jesus.*³⁹ We must *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,*⁴⁰ or receive Him in the character in which He is made known to us in the

³⁷ Psalm xciv. 6. ³⁸ Matt. vi. 9. ³⁹ Gal. iii. 26. ⁴⁰ Acts xvi. 31.

word of God, as *the only begotten of the Father*,⁴¹ *God manifest in the flesh* to be our Redeemer, or we cannot approach with acceptance into the Divine presence. He is the *one Mediator between God and men*;⁴² and we must therefore put our cause into His hands, as our *Advocate* and *Intercessor*, and *the propitiation for our sins*,⁴³ if we would obtain an answer to our humble supplications. The apostle, on his bended knees, approached the almighty and most merciful Father of the family of our Lord Jesus Christ, as one of His children, to implore the rich blessings which He graciously bestows upon them that call upon His name, for Christ's sake.

He prayed to God for the members of the church at Ephesus, *That He would grant them according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. The riches of His glory* are the inexhaustible treasures of glorious blessings with which His hands are filled, and which He dispenses to the needy suppliants at His footstool. He is the great and glorious Fountain of all good, and *is rich unto all them that call upon Him*,⁴⁴ ready to give them every blessing which He sees that it will be for their good to receive.

The first blessing which the apostle supplicates, is, that they might *be strengthened with*

⁴¹ John i. 18. ⁴² 1 Tim. iii. 16; ii. 5. ⁴³ 1 John ii. 1, 2. ⁴⁴ Rom. x. 12.

might by His Spirit in the inner man. This may remind us of the encouraging declaration of our blessed Lord to His disciples, *If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.*⁴⁵ Here we learn one purpose, and a principal one, for which the Holy Spirit is given to the children of God. We are exposed to the assaults of various spiritual enemies, against whom we are unable successfully to contend, because of our weakness; unless Divine aid and strength be supplied to uphold us in our spiritual warfare. It is *the inner man*, the mind and understanding, the heart and affections, that needs to *be strengthened by the Holy Spirit.* The warfare in which the members of the church militant here on earth are engaged, is an internal warfare; a warfare against Satan and his angels, against wicked spirits which are continually suggesting evil thoughts to their minds, and endeavouring to stir up the evil propensities of their fallen nature; a warfare against innate corruption, which seconds the assaults of the powers of darkness; a warfare against *the world that lieth in wickedness*;⁴⁶ which tries, as opportunity offers, by its smiles or by its frowns, to allure or to intimidate the Christian to *walk in a way that is not good*,⁴⁷ contrary to the word and will of God.

⁴⁵ Luke xi. 13.⁴⁶ 1 John v. 19.⁴⁷ Isaiah lxxv. 2.

Strength from on high is needful to enable him to maintain the conflict with his powerful foes. It must however be maintained through life vigorously and incessantly, if we would obtain the victory, and receive *the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus*.⁴⁸ Nothing but the might of the Spirit of God will enable us to hold out to the end. If then we be Christians indeed, we shall pray earnestly for ourselves, that we may *be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, to fight the good fight of faith*⁴⁹ against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The apostle represents this conflict in the most serious light, when he says, *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, not merely against our own innate depravity, which it requires the most painful self-denial to resist, and not merely against the ungodly who surround us; but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness, (or wicked spirits) in high places*.⁵⁰ Nothing but being *strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man* will ensure to us victory over these powerful foes. They carry all before them in the world, without resistance; their dominion is quietly and willingly submitted to by mankind. Hence Satan is called *the god of this world*,⁵¹ and *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the child-*

⁴⁸ Phil. iii. 14. ⁴⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 12. ⁵⁰ Eph. vi. 10-12; ii. 2. ⁵¹ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

*ren of disobedience.*⁵⁰ He worketh effectually and powerfully, or with energy, as the word means. The true Christian alone, of all the people of the world, resists this powerful adversary. And he does this *not by might, nor by power* of his own; his own strength for resistance is perfect weakness; *but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*⁵¹ It is the Spirit of God who strengthens him to maintain the conflict, and to obtain the victory. It is *the God of peace who bruises Satan under his feet.*⁵² The believer is made *strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.* He *puts on the whole armour of God, that he may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil;*⁵³ and thus he is enabled to go on conquering and to conquer, and to triumph over all the power of the enemy. But in consequence of the subtilty and vigilance of his spiritual adversary, he is often in danger of falling; it is only while he depends upon Divine aid, and looks for the help of the Spirit of God to strengthen him with strength in his soul, that he is safe. This made the Psalmist pray, *Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*⁵⁴ It is the purpose of Satan to overthrow our goings; but while we seek strength from Him who *will keep the feet of His saints,*⁵⁵ all the efforts of the enemy of our souls will be counteracted and defeated, so that he will not be able to prevail

⁵² Zech. iv. 6. ⁵³ Rom. xvi. 20. ⁵⁴ Psalm xvii. 5. ⁵⁵ 1 Sam. ii. 9.

against us ; but being thus resisted, *he will flee from us.*⁵⁶

The apostle next prays, *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith* ; or that He might possess the best affections of their souls ; that they might enjoy His spiritual presence, and have communion and fellowship with Him in the spirit of their minds ; that He would lift upon them the light of His reconciled countenance, and grant them His favour and protection. What blessedness is this ! When Christ dwells in the heart, He is *the hope of glory.*⁵⁷ Those to whom He manifests Himself as He does not unto the world, are enabled to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* He brings peace to their consciences and joy to their souls, so that they *abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost.*⁵⁸ *Their life is hid with Christ in God ; and when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory.*⁵⁷ But it is *by faith* that Christ dwells in the hearts of His people ; according to the language of St. John, they *know and believe the love that He hath to them*, the love which He manifested in giving Himself for them, *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.* It is the belief of this that wins their hearts to Him ; the belief that *He made peace through the blood of His cross,*⁵⁷ so that they are *reconciled to God by the*

⁵⁶ James iv. 7. ⁵⁷ Col. i. 27, 20 ; iii. 3, 4. ⁵⁸ Rom. v. 3, 10 ; xv. 13.

*death of His Son;*⁵⁸ and are permitted to call Him their Father, and to come into His presence at all times as His children, *in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make known their requests*⁵⁹ at His footstool, through their Mediator and Intercessor; that asking they may receive and their *joy may be full.*⁶⁰ It is on account of believing in the efficacy of His atonement for sin, that His people love Him. This was the great proof given of the love of Christ, for which they will love and praise Him throughout eternity.

The apostle prays further, *That they might be rooted and grounded in love;* or that they might strike root in this love of Christ, as trees strike root deep and wide in a good soil; that they might have such a firm hold upon it, as could not be loosened or eradicated, *the full assurance of faith*⁶¹ in His merits and propitiation; that their foundation might be laid deep and large in the love of Christ, so as to support a lofty and massive superstructure *to the praise of the glory of His grace.*⁶² Here we learn how deeply our minds ought to be impressed, and as it were imbued with the love of Christ. In order to strike root in it, so as to bear corresponding fruit, our meditations must be continually directed towards it; that gratitude may fill our hearts to Him *who loved us and gave Himself for us.*⁶² And if our

⁵⁹ Phil. iv. 6. ⁶⁰ John xvi. 24. ⁶¹ Heb. x. 22. ⁶² Eph. i. 6; v. 25.

foundation be laid in it, all our hopes towards God will be built upon it. We cannot place too much dependence upon Christ, or think too highly of the exceeding *great love wherewith He hath loved us.*⁶³ If this be the soil in which we strike root, all the storms of temptation or affliction will not be able to shake us ; the wintry blast of adversity will only make us adhere the more firmly to Him, as *all our salvation, and all our desire.*⁶⁴ If this be the foundation on which we build, the rain descending, the flood swelling, the wind blowing, the torrent or the tempest will not greatly affect us, will not *separate us from the love of Christ,*⁶⁵ but only make us adhere to Him the more closely and firmly. As our Saviour said to His disciples, *Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ; and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock.*⁶⁶ The storms and tempests of adversity only prove how great is the security of those who confide in the love of Christ.

It is prayed on their behalf, that they might *be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height* of this love. It is the high privilege of the saints of God, and of them alone, to enter upon this de-

⁶³ Eph. ii. 4. ⁶⁴ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. ⁶⁵ Rom. viii. 35. ⁶⁶ Matt. vii. 24, 25.

lightful subject; what is the breadth or extent of it, from east to west, from north to south, throughout the whole world. In reference to which the Psalmist observes, *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.* What is the length or continuance of it in all ages; as it is said, *The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him; and His righteousness unto children's children.* What is the depth of it, descending to the lowest state of misery to be found on earth. For He *remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever; and He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid His face from him, but when he cried unto Him, He heard him.* And what is the height of it; for as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.⁶⁷ It is only by considering the love of Christ in all its bearings, that we can know any thing on this wonderful subject. Hints are however given to direct us in our researches, that we may obtain some slight knowledge of it; *and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;* but it far exceeds all our conceptions. As it is said of the perfections of the Almighty in general, *It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know?*⁶⁸ So the love of Christ

⁶⁷ Psalm ciii. 11, 12, 17; cxxxvi. 23; xxii. 24. ⁶⁸ Job xi. 8.

towards the sinful children of men is truly incomprehensible, beyond our imaginations or conceptions; it is a subject which the mind of man, which even the intellect of angels can never fully explore. When we contemplate it, we may well exclaim with the apostle, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, or determinations, and His ways past finding out!*⁶⁹ At the same time this is the most interesting subject which the mind of man can contemplate; and it will fully repay all the research which the saints of God may direct towards it. They alone indeed are able to comprehend any thing of the love of Christ; they alone know its value; they alone meditate upon it with gratitude of heart. While the people of the world are seeking happiness in every empty bubble, which alternately amuses and disappoints them, so that they are continually inquiring in vain, *Who will show us any good?*⁷⁰ the believer in Christ, the despised saint, finds real delight in meditating on the love of Christ, his Lord and Saviour; and in obtaining fresh discoveries of its breadth and length, its depth and height; or of the blessings conferred by means of it on the children of God in time and in eternity; its eternal source, its everlasting duration. This is indeed an infinite subject. The comprehend-

⁶⁹ Romans xi. 33.⁷⁰ Psalm iv. 6.

ing of it is the joy of the saints in heaven, as well as of those on earth.

The apostle could add nothing more to include all conceivable blessedness, than to pray, *That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.* To understand and experience this is to reach the summit of happiness. It is the highest happiness of heaven; beyond which happiness is not to be conceived of. And yet worms of the dust are permitted and invited to seek for this supreme happiness, even while they are here on earth; that they may be completely happy in partaking of the blessings of Divine grace. How wonderful is this! One would think it would be enough to inflame our desires to the utmost, only to hear that such blessedness is to be attained here below. But oh! the folly of mankind. When they are invited to partake of the blessedness of heaven, they refuse it for the most part with disdain; they prefer the merest trifles, the most momentary gratifications of earth, the pleasures of sin for a season, to eternal joys and pleasures for evermore. The riches of the glory of God, those glorious riches which He graciously offers to them, are despised as though they were of no value. But if we be deprived of them hereafter, we shall ever bewail our folly when it is too late. Let us then be wise in time, that we may be rich for eternity. *To be filled with all the fulness of God,* is to be completely happy in the enjoy-

ment of every spiritual blessing, both for this life and for that which is to come.

These are the blessings for which the children of God are encouraged to ask their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus; to these it is their privilege to direct their meditations. On these their thoughts are occupied; the obtaining of these is their earnest desire; for these their fervent supplications are addressed to the throne of grace. And they are encouraged to expect from the Giver of all good even more than these gifts, great as they are. On which account the apostle bursts forth in a song of praise and thanksgiving: *Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.* Here he describes the God of all grace as able to give even more than what he had spoken of. And He is as willing as He is able, of which His *power that worketh in* His believing people is a full and convincing proof. *For it is God which worketh in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*⁷¹ To this the apostle ascribed his own willingness to labour in the cause of God; *I labour, striving according to His working which worketh in me mightily.*⁷² From the operation of the Spirit of

⁷¹ Philippians ii. 13.

⁷² Colossians i. 29.

God in the hearts of His children, encouragement is to be derived to seek from Him still greater blessings than those with which we have been favoured; since *He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*. We are to enlarge our petitions, that all His *exceeding great and precious promises*⁷³ may be fulfilled to us; and we are still to expect that blessings inconceivable will be bestowed upon us. Oh! that we had that confidence in God which we are encouraged by His holy word to place in Him. We should then be fully assured *that all things would work together for our good*,⁷⁴ as well as *to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved*.⁷⁵ And being confident of this very thing, *that He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*,⁷⁶ we should glorify and praise His holy name. He must have the glory of His own work. And this is the end which we should have in view while we seek for the blessings of His grace; that He may be glorified in us and by us. It is only *in the church and by Christ Jesus* that glory redounds to God, and will do so for evermore. His dealings with His church and people excite the attention and admiration of the heavenly hosts. *Unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the church the mani-*

⁷³ 2 Peter i. 4. ⁷⁴ Rom. viii. 28. ⁷⁵ Eph. i. 6. ⁷⁶ Phil. i. 6.

*fold wisdom of God.*⁷⁷ They glorify God for His love and His power displayed towards His church ; and His church itself, when delivered from its militant state, will glorify Him *throughout all ages, world without end* ; for it will triumph in His unfathomable and boundless love for evermore.

Let us then adopt the prayer and the doxology of the apostle for ourselves. Sensible of our weakness, let us seek Divine strength day by day to enable us to contend successfully against the enemies of our souls. Let us seek also to enjoy the spiritual consolation which the word of God sets before us as received through faith in our ever blessed Redeemer. Let us direct our meditations to the wonderful love which He manifested in giving Himself for us to be the propitiation for our sins, that through Him we might be reconciled unto God ; and let us seek to partake of the blessedness promised to His believing people, both in this life and in that which is to come. Let us glorify and praise the God of all grace day by day for His goodness to us, and hope to praise Him more and better throughout eternity.

⁷⁷ Ephesians iii. 10.

SERMON LII.

FOR

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CHRISTIAN CALLING.

Ephesians iv. 1.

I THEREFORE, THE PRISONER OF THE LORD,
BESEECH YOU, THAT YE WALK WORTHY
OF THE VOCATION WHEREWITH YE ARE
CALLED.

WHEN we consider the inoffensiveness of the spirit of Christianity, and its indisposition to interfere with the political affairs of the world; and take into account the personal character and conduct of the apostle Paul, and the precepts which he inculcated respecting the duty of submission to the powers that be, as the ordinance of God for the welfare of society; it seems very extraordinary that he should have been a prisoner, when he wrote this epistle, as if he had been guilty of some crime against the state. Of the

reason why he was taken to Rome as a prisoner, we have a full account in the Acts of the Apostles. He himself speaks of it briefly in his address to *the chief of the Jews*, who resided in that city. *He said unto them, Though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans; who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cesar.*⁷⁸ He was therefore sent to plead his own cause before the Roman emperor. The Jews of Jerusalem were not only opposed to the dissemination of Christianity among their own countrymen, but also set themselves in opposition to its diffusion among the Gentiles; as if the most degrading idolatry were preferable to Christianity. Their hatred to it induced them to represent Christians as seditious persons. And they did this with such vehemence, that the rulers of various countries thought themselves bound to take notice of the accusation. The Roman governors of Judea, Felix and Festus, were evidently compelled to interfere respecting the apostle Paul contrary to their wishes and intentions, in order to be popular with the chief men of the nation. The overruling providence of God, however, by this means

⁷⁸ Acts xxviii. 17—19, 30, 31.

directed that St. Paul should be taken to Rome ; and through his imprisonment there, should have an opportunity of giving to the gospel of Christ a more extensive circulation than before ; in consequence of being visited by persons from various parts of the world who might hear him, and carry back to their respective countries the glad tidings which he had communicated to them. For it is said, that *Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him ; preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*⁷⁸ The ways of God are very mysterious. It seems extraordinary that so harmless a person, whose only object was to promulgate the gospel of peace, should have met with so much persecution. But he was satisfied in his own mind that all was for the best ; since we find him saying, in an epistle which he wrote from this city, *The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel ; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and in all other places ; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*⁷⁹ He considered himself as *the prisoner of the Lord*, rather than of men ; and he laid hold of the opportunity afforded him by be-

⁷⁹ Philippians i. 12—14.

ing brought into this situation to promote the cause in which he was engaged ; and the blessing of God attended his labours. By his imprisonment also he had leisure to write to the various churches *among whom* he had *gone preaching the kingdom of God*;⁸⁰ and to this we are indebted for some of the most valuable of his epistles. In this to the Ephesians he took occasion from the circumstance of his imprisonment, to impress the principles and practice of Christianity upon the minds of the persons to whom he wrote. In that portion of it which is appointed by our church as the Epistle for this day, he,

First, Reminds Christians of their vocation or calling, for the purpose of beseeching them to live suitably to it ; and

Secondly, Makes use of a powerful argument to enforce his exhortation.

May the Spirit of God, who directed the apostle to record this exhortation for the benefit of His church and people in all ages, apply it to our hearts ; that being influenced by it, we may be led to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*,⁸¹ and may enjoy the consolations which are vouchsafed to the children of God.

First, The apostle's address to those who had received the gospel of Christ is : *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk*

⁸⁰ Acts xx. 25.

⁸¹ Titus ii. 10.

worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. In his epistle to the Philippians St. Paul terms this vocation, *the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*⁸² It is a calling from on high, from God, outwardly by His word, and inwardly by His Spirit. He sends His gospel to mankind by His ministers, and He applies it to the hearts of those who hear it by the power of His Spirit. Let us regard the gospel of Christ as a calling upon us from on high, to attend to the things which belong to our everlasting peace, that we may give it that consideration which we ought to do. It is also termed *a holy calling.*⁸³ It is a calling to holiness of heart and life, to separation from *the world that lieth in wickedness,*⁸⁴ to devotedness to the service of God. None are therefore partakers of this vocation but those who are following *holiness*, or purity of heart and uprightness of conduct, *without which no man shall see the Lord* in His eternal kingdom and glory, nor shall have fellowship with Him here on earth. The unholy in heart and life are not the children of God, but the children of the wicked one; let their profession of religion be what it may. The children of God are further styled, *holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.*⁸⁵ The object of their vocation is *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who*

⁸² Phil. iii. 14. ⁸³ 2 Tim. i. 9. ⁸⁴ 1 John v. 19. ⁸⁵ Heb. xii. 14; iii. 1.

*are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.*⁸⁶

Heaven is the Christian's home, to which he is looking forward as the end of his earthly pilgrimage; as the patriarchs of old *looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*⁸⁷ This is frequently set before believers in Christ for their encouragement. It is said to them, *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.* This is stated for the purpose of leading them to *set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*⁸⁸ Thus the vocation wherewith believers in Christ are called, is a *high*, a *holy*, and a *heavenly calling*. God is the Author of it; holiness is the way of it, the path in which all must walk who are partakers of it; and heaven is the end of it.

The walk which is worthy of this vocation is described in the two following verses. *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* By *lowliness*, we may understand humility of heart; by *meekness*, humility of conduct. The word translated *lowliness*, literally means, *humbleness of mind*. This is the first thing which true religion produces. When a man is truly convinced of sin by the operation of the Spirit of God, he is humbled

⁸⁶ 1 Peter i. 4, 5. ⁸⁷ Heb. xi. 10. ⁸⁸ Col. iii. 4, 2.

before God in his heart and mind, he is *lowly in his own eyes*;⁸⁹ he loathes himself on account of his sinfulness; he earnestly repents and is heartily sorry for the sins which he has committed. Until we come heart-broken to the footstool of the mercy-seat, there will be no separation between us and sin. Sin will not be detested and abhorred as an accursed thing, until we are humbled as guilty transgressors in the presence of our most holy and merciful God. There is such a thing as being afraid of the consequences of sin, without being humbled before God because of our sinfulness. Until true contrition of spirit or humbleness of mind be produced in us, there will be no forsaking of sin as an evil, or as that which is most displeasing to God; although there may be other circumstances which may prevent the commission of it in particular instances. That humbleness of mind which proceeds from the fear of God alone, is what the apostle here inculcates as suitable to the Christian vocation. And *meekness*, or humility of conduct, is the result of this. The apostle exhorts his dear son in the faith, Timothy, *In meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves*;⁹⁰ and Titus, *to show all meekness to all men*.⁹¹ By their conduct in this respect they were to *commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*;⁹² that the excellency of the

⁸⁹ Psalm xv. 4. ⁹⁰ 2 Tim. ii. 25. ⁹¹ Titus iii. 2. ⁹² 2 Cor. iv. 2.

doctrine which they taught might appear, as that which is from God; and thus a good effect might be produced by the beauty of Christian practice being exhibited to those who received their instruction. Oh! that all who *name the name of Christ*,⁹³ and “profess and call themselves Christians,” were more sensible of their obligations to the redeeming grace and dying love of their Lord and Saviour; that they might, as becomes them, *be clothed with humility*; remembering that *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*.⁹⁴ It is by lowliness of mind and meekness of behaviour, that the Christian is to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*.

To this humility of mind and conduct, the apostle adds, *With longsuffering*, or patience, *forbearing one another in love*. As humility may be called the badge of the Christian profession, which the believer in Christ is to exhibit to all mankind; so the patience or *longsuffering* here commanded seems to be applicable more especially to the intercourse which the children of God have with each other. Love should prevail in the family of Christ. This was inculcated frequently, both by our Saviour and His apostles. He said, *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are*

⁹³ 2 Tim. ii. 19. ⁹⁴ 2 Peter v. 5. ⁹⁵ John xiii. 34, 35.

*My disciples, if ye have love one to another.*⁹⁵ St. Peter exhorts Christians, *See that ye love one another with a pure heart, fervently.*⁹⁶ St. Paul admonished, *Let love be without dissimulation. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.*⁹⁷ St. John declared, *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*⁹⁸ That the effect of these admonitions was not lost upon the primitive Christians, appears from the testimony which was borne by the heathen respecting them, who said among themselves, "See how these Christians love one another." Wherever love to Christ is in the heart, love to the brethren must exist in connexion with it. It is of this love that St. Peter speaks, when he says, *Charity shall cover the multitude of sins*; and therefore exhorts, *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.*⁹⁶ Love conceals our offences or faults from the eyes of each other, so that we do not notice or observe them. And even when these faults are numerous, and cannot well escape observation, it leads to the exercise of patience and forbearance; because we are sensible of the multitude of our own transgressions against our heavenly Father, for which we have need to ask His forgiveness; and therefore we are willing to forgive others, as we hope to be forgiven ourselves.

⁹⁵ 1 Peter i. 22; iv. 8. ⁹⁶ Rom. xii. 9, 10. ⁹⁷ 1 John iii. 14.

The longsuffering of God towards us demands a suitable return ; and it is thus only that we can evince our gratitude for it. *For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*⁹⁹ When we think of the patience and longsuffering of Christ under what He endured “for us men and for our salvation,” we should be constrained most powerfully to love Him, and all our brethren, who are *partakers of the benefit*¹ by a living faith in His name. The love which His believing people are bound to exercise towards each other, is surely most reasonable, as well as conducive to their own happiness.

Christians are also to *endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. This object they are continually to propose to themselves, that their bond of union may be strengthened by being at peace among themselves ; and there may be no divisions, no schisms, no splitting into parties. The present state of the Christian church shows how needful it was that such an exhortation should be given. For how frequently does it appear that zeal is not governed by discretion in those who profess to have received *the truth as it is in Jesus*,² in the love of it ; and that the union of Christians, as *one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*,³ is esteemed

⁹⁹ 1 John iv. 20. ¹ 1 Tim. vi. 2. ² Eph. iv. 21. ³ Rom. xii. 5.

of very little consequence. The church of Christ is here called, *The unity of the Spirit*. It consists of those who *are one in Christ Jesus*,⁴ as the members of His mystical body, in consequence of being influenced by the Holy Spirit. For *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His*.⁵ From the use of this epithet the apostle proceeds,

Secondly, To bring forward some considerations which are calculated to influence the minds of the children of God to a compliance with his exhortation. He says, *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling*. The church of Christ is *one body*; which being united to Him by a living faith, and having a true love to Him, *groweth up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love*.⁶ All the members of this body depend upon their Head for every supply that is needful for their nourishment and growth; and from Him they receive all the blessings of which they are partakers. *There is one Spirit*, by whom the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified. On this subject the apostle says to the Corinthians, *As the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of*

⁴ Gal. iii. 28.⁵ Rom. viii. 9.⁶ Eph. iv. 15, 16.

*that one body, being many, are one body : so also is Christ, with regard to His mystical body the church. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For we are many members, yet but one body ; the body of Christ, and members in particular,*⁷ or of various parts of the same body. The Holy Spirit, of which they all partake, is the great bond of union between believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. By His gracious influence upon their souls, they are enabled to love Him who loved them and gave Himself for them ; and also to live in love towards each other as the members of His mystical body, or the children of their Father which is in heaven. For *every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him.*⁸ By the grace of the Holy Spirit they are effectually called ; or, according to the language of our seventeenth Article of religion, “They be called according to God’s purpose by His Spirit working in due season, and they through grace obey the calling ;” so that their affections are engaged in the service of God, and their hopes are directed to things unseen and eternal.

This being the work of the Spirit of God, it is added, *Ye are called in one hope of your calling.*

⁷ 1 Corinthians xii. 12, 13, 20, 27.

⁸ 1 John v. 1.

This is *in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*⁹ It is the privilege of the humble believer in Christ, being influenced by the Spirit of His grace, to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*¹⁰ All who are taught of God hope to be made partakers of *an exceeding and eternal weight of glory*¹¹ in the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour: and this is a *good hope through grace,*¹² a well founded hope, which they may freely indulge; a *hope that maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto*¹⁰ them. This hope of eternal life, which the children of God possess, is derived from the Spirit of God; and the more it is cultivated in connexion with the consideration of the calling of which they are partakers, the more sensible will they be of their need of the influences of the Holy Spirit to enable them to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called;* and the more diligently will they seek His grace, that they may indulge this hope with confidence and without presumption.

In pursuing this subject of the unity of the church of Christ, the apostle goes on to say, that there is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism.* Jesus Christ is the *one Lord,* King, and Governor of His people, who rules in them and reigns over

⁹ Titus i. 2. ¹⁰ Rom. v. 2, 5. ¹¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17. ¹² 2 Thess. ii. 16.

them. *He is Lord of all,*¹³ and of Him it is said, *The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.*¹⁴ While He orders all things for them in providence and in grace, they submit themselves to His sovereign authority, and live in obedience to His holy laws. They have *one faith; the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,*¹⁵ is that which they profess. They *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,*¹⁶ and put their trust in His redemption and His merits, for the pardon of their sins, their reconciliation to God, and the eternal salvation of their souls. They are partakers of *one baptism*, by which they were admitted into the visible church, as members of the mystical body of Christ; and a public profession was made in their names, that they should believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life; renouncing the devil, the world, and the flesh, so as not to follow or be led by them.

They have therefore *one God and Father of all*, whose *children they are by faith in Christ Jesus.*¹⁶ They are brought to the knowledge of God as their reconciled Father through Christ; and they look up to Him with filial fear and affection, depending upon Him for His blessing and protection continually. And they know and believe

¹³ Acts x. 36; xvi. 31. ¹⁴ Rom. x. 12. ¹⁵ Jude 3. ¹⁶ Gal. iii. 26.

that He whom they worship and adore, is truly God *above all*, or over all; who has all things under His controul and direction, and *is able to do* for them *exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think*;¹⁷ that He is *through all*, as He fills heaven and earth, and pervades all things with His presence; He is every where present at all times; all things are open to His observation and notice; there is nothing hid from His all-seeing eye; and through Christ He dwells in their hearts by faith; and that He is *in them all*. He dwells in them and with them, and is ever ready to manifest His watchful care over them, and to order all things in His overruling providence as shall be most for their good and His own glory. And they become the habitation of God through the Spirit; *and hereby they know that He abideth in them, by the Spirit which He hath given them*.¹⁸

Here we may observe that the apostle refers to the ever blessed Triune Jehovah. His subject leads him to speak first of the Spirit of God, by whom the children of God are effectually called to be members of the mystical body of Christ, and have a good hope of eternal life. Then of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they are enabled to believe, and in the faith of whom they are baptized. And lastly, of God the Father, to

¹⁷ Ephesians iii. 20.

¹⁸ 1 John iii. 24.

whose paternal care and protection they are introduced by the calling of the Spirit of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. Thus the three sacred Persons of the one Godhead are referred to, and the office sustained by each in the covenant of redemption; in order to show the privileges to which they are entitled who are admitted to *the unity of the Spirit*. Let us seek to know the Father through the Son, or that the God of heaven is our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus our Saviour; and to know the Son through the Spirit, or that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer and Mediator, through the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Thus we shall have a practical acquaintance with the doctrine of the Trinity; and, beholding the God of heaven as the God of love, we shall rejoice that He has revealed to us in His holy word how we may know Him in this most endearing character; and be enabled to *love Him because He first loved us*, and to give up ourselves to His service, that His name may be glorified in us and by us.

May the exhortation of the apostle sink deep into our minds, that we may live to the glory of God, in the enjoyment of His favour, and may be blessed by Him in time and in eternity.

SERMON LIII.

FOR

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EFFECT OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

I Corinthians i. 4.

I THANK MY GOD ALWAYS ON YOUR BEHALF,
FOR THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN
YOU BY JESUS CHRIST.

THE success which attended the ministry of the gospel was always a cause of gratitude to the apostle Paul. Love to the Lord Jesus Christ filled his heart; and therefore, when he saw *that the word of the Lord had free course and was glorified*, he rejoiced in the honour that was brought to God, as well as in the benefit received by his fellow creatures. We may observe his constant anxiety on this subject. *The care of all the churches lay upon him daily*, and he felt it to be no light burden. His affection for those to whom his ministry had been blessed, was great indeed;

he prayed earnestly for them, he fervently admonished them, and he gave thanks on their behalf, for every indication of their partaking of the blessings which the gospel of Christ was designed to convey to them. The great cause of his thankfulness for the Corinthians appears in the Epistle for this day. Oh! that we might have the same cause of gratitude, each on his own account, as the apostle had for the church at Corinth. And let it be our prayer that the blessing of the Holy Spirit may rest upon us, while we consider the manner in which the grace of God operated in the primitive Christians, that we may seek for the same grace to be bestowed upon ourselves, to the consolation and salvation of our own souls.

The causes of the apostle's thankfulness to God are the subjects to which our attention is to be directed. The first thing mentioned is, *for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ*. The grace of God is the source of every blessing which His people enjoy. But here the word is evidently used to denote a special gift bestowed, in consequence of its recipients being united to the Lord Jesus Christ by a living faith; and therefore it seems to apply particularly to the Holy Spirit which our blessed Saviour promised to bestow upon His disciples, and which is the great gift vouchsafed under the Christian dispensation; insomuch that *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*.¹⁹ That they

were partakers of the gift of the Holy Ghost was then the cause of the apostle's thankfulness to God; that their minds were brought under His sacred influence; by means of which they gave undoubted evidence that they were truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a common description of the primitive Christians, that they *were filled with the Holy Ghost*.²⁰ And this is what we should be desirous of above all things for ourselves, that we may partake of His gracious influences in our own souls; that *the God of hope would fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost*.¹⁹

The effect produced in them by *the grace of God which was given to them was, that in every thing they were enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge*. They were spiritually enriched. However poor they might be as to the things of this world, they were *rich towards God; rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him*,²¹ and especially *enriched in all utterance and in all knowledge*. The effects of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon believers of the gospel of Christ in those days were most remarkable. When St. Peter preached to the family of Cornelius, it is said, *The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the*

¹⁹ Rom. viii. 9; xv. 13.²⁰ Acts xiii. 52.²¹ James ii. 5.

*word; and they spake with tongues and magnified God.*²² Utterance was given to them in languages with which they were not before acquainted, to enable them to magnify God, and bring glory to His name. Our apostle states to the Corinthians that, *the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.*²³ On another occasion we find him desiring Christians to pray for him, *that utterance might be given unto him, that he might open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, that therein he might speak boldly as he ought to speak.*²⁴ In the case before us then, we may conclude that *utterance* was granted to enable the believers in Christ at Corinth to make known to all around them that blessed gospel which they had believed; and the *knowledge* of Divine truth was vouchsafed to them, to enable them to declare what was in reality the mind and will of God, according to His own revelation. But this *knowledge* may also be considered as having been communicated to them for their own benefit. It was deemed so valuable by the apostle in this point of view, that he declared to the Philippians, *Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*²⁵ And he was anxious

²² Acts x. 44, 46. ²³ 1 Cor. xii. 7, 8. ²⁴ Eph. vi. 19, 20. ²⁵ Phil. iii. 8.

on behalf of the Colossians and Laodiceans *that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*²⁶ St. Peter also exhorted Christians, *Grow, or increase, in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*²⁷ To have a right knowledge of Divine truth for ourselves, is most important for our own comfort. And the apostle Paul evidently considered it to be peculiarly desirable to have the ability of communicating this knowledge to others. So much so, that when the gospel of Christ was preached even from the most unworthy motives, it was a matter of rejoicing and thankfulness to him. He says to the Philippians, *Some preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*²⁸ In whatever way the knowledge of the Saviour of sinners was spread abroad, it caused joy of heart to St. Paul that His precious name was made known

²⁶ Col. ii. 2, 3.²⁷ 2 Peter iii. 18.²⁸ Phil. i. 15—18.

at all events. He hoped that some would receive benefit, that some would believe the truth, and be saved by means of it.

But he rejoiced especially respecting the Corinthians, that it was in consequence of the influence of Divine grace that they were made acquainted with the truth of the gospel, and were enabled to make it known to others; otherwise he could not have appealed to them, *even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.* The testimony of Christ was that important saving truth of which the apostle had borne witness to them; respecting which he says afterwards, *Christ sent me to preach the gospel,* and which he terms *the preaching of the cross of Christ,* or of *Christ crucified,* and sums up by saying, *Of God are ye in Christ Jesus, who of Him is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.* The testimony of Christ relates to the work which He accomplished in human nature for the redemption of mankind; and is the glad tidings of the pardon of sin, and reconciliation with God, granted to the sinful children of men through faith in His name; in consequence of which spiritual and eternal blessings are bestowed upon them. On this subject the apostle John declares, *This is the record, or testimony, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*²⁹ This

was the theme which the apostles of Christ went forth to inculcate, in obedience to the command of their Lord and Master; when He commissioned them to *go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*³⁰ They found mankind sinners against God; transgressors of His holy law; living in disobedience to His authority; having transferred their allegiance from their Creator to His enemy, the prince of darkness; and they went forth, proclaiming pardon and peace in His name to all who should truly turn to Him. They declared, *that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;*³¹ that Christ had *made peace by the blood of His cross;* and they called upon all who were desirous of attaining to the knowledge of the true God, from whom they had been separated by their sins, to *behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,*³² and put their trust in His propitiation for the pardon of their sins, and their reconciliation with God. Thus they preached *Christ crucified* as the only hope of guilty sinners before God. And this testimony concerning Christ was received by the Corinthians in the same manner as he described its reception by the Thessalonians, when he said to them, *For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard*

²⁹ 1 John v. 11, 12. ³⁰ Mark xv. 15. ³¹ 2 Cor. v. 19. ³² John i. 29.

*of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*³³ They received the truth in the love of it, and the consequence was, *the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them*; they became established in the truth; they were *grounded and settled*³⁴ in it, so that they were not to be turned aside by every wind of doctrine. And the blessings which they received in consequence of embracing the Christian profession and believing the gospel, were to them a confirmation of the truth of *the testimony of Christ* which had been made known to them.

The grace of God was vouchsafed to them in such an abundant measure, that they *came behind in no gift*. They were not destitute of any of those miraculous effusions which were bestowed upon the primitive church; and they had every spiritual blessing that they could enjoy. The Spirit was poured upon them from on high, and they were happy and joyful in possessing the gifts of His grace; they walked humbly with their God, and rejoiced greatly in His salvation. It was to *the fruit of the Spirit* which was produced by them *in all goodness and righteousness and truth*,³⁵ that I conceive the apostle particularly referred as having been abundantly manifested in them by Divine grace. It is for the gift of the

33 1 Thess. ii. 13.

34 Col. i. 23.

35 Eph. v. 9.

Spirit in His teaching and sanctifying grace that we are to seek in all ages of the church; in order that believers in Christ may enjoy the blessings which are set before them, and may be pleasing to God in their life and conduct; or, in other words, may be holy and happy. Let it be our earnest prayer that *the testimony of Christ* may be *confirmed in us*, by our partaking of the gift of the Holy Ghost to influence and sanctify our souls. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, in His miraculous powers, were of use only for a time; for the introduction and establishment of Christianity in the world, as the true religion. His ordinary operations are to be looked for in all ages, for the personal consolation and sanctification of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us seek these for ourselves, that we may be comforted, and God may be glorified in us and by us.

The spiritual blessings of which the Corinthian believers were partakers, led them to look forward with a hope of receiving still greater blessings hereafter. The apostle therefore describes them as *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Great are the benefits which believers in Christ receive from their Lord and Saviour in this world, for which they have abundant reason to thank and praise Him. Their present salvation from sin, both as to its guilt and its dominion, is an unspeakable blessing. To be *delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the king-*

*dom of God's dear Son,*³⁶ to be numbered among *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*, is a high privilege indeed. But the Christian's future prospects of blessedness are far beyond his present joys. His expectations hereafter are such, that no sublunary enjoyment of any kind will admit of a moment's comparison with the blessedness that will be bestowed upon him *at the appearing of Jesus Christ*. A loss incalculable would it prove to *gain the whole world*, or all that the world can possibly give to its votaries in honours, in riches, and in pleasures; and after all to *lose the soul*. So said the lips of Divine truth itself, when our Lord Jesus Christ asked the important questions, *What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*³⁷ The folly of seeking our portion in this life will be most evident, when *the Son of man shall appear in the glory of His Father, with His angels, and then shall reward every man according to his works.*³⁸ This coming, or revelation of Jesus Christ, is described in the most solemn and awful language. It is said, *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*. His coming will be to the terror of His

³⁶ Col. i. 13.³⁷ Mark viii. 36, 37.³⁸ Matt. xvi. 27.

adversaries ; but *in that great and awful day He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*³⁹

It is for this *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* that the believer is *waiting*. He is assured that Christ will appear to the joy of His people. Of this coming of his Saviour, the apostle says, for the encouragement of believers, *When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.*⁴⁰ The idea of the second coming of his Redeemer filled the mind of the beloved disciple with such holy rapture, that he exclaimed, in admiration of the love which had provided the means of salvation for fallen man, and had promised to put him in possession of it, *Behold! what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.*⁴¹ Did we look upon *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* in the manner in which it is represented to us in the holy scriptures, we should direct our expectations towards it with more ardent desire. It is the high privilege of those who have believed through grace to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*; because *a crown of glory that fadeth not*

³⁹ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 10. ⁴⁰ Col. iii. 4. ⁴¹ 1 John iii. 1, 2.

*away*⁴² is promised to all them that love the appearing of Jesus Christ; a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give them at that day.⁴³ They are therefore exhorted to be looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.⁴⁴

But, alas! instead of living in expectation and hope of the rest that remaineth for the people of God; instead of believing that the promise will be fulfilled to us, that an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;⁴⁵ and therefore waiting all the days of our appointed time till our change come, having our minds set upon the heavenly inheritance of the saints of God; how prone are we to seek our rest in this world, and to leave that which is beyond the skies to future consideration and attention, to that awful hour when this world and all its concerns can no longer be looked upon as claiming our regard, because we are about to be called to part with it, and to be no longer seen upon earth. But how foolish and vain, how trifling and worthless do all the things of this present time appear, when those which are beyond it are realized to the

⁴²1 Peter v. 4. ⁴³2 Tim. iv. 8. ⁴⁴Titus ii. 13, 14. ⁴⁵2 Peter i. 11, 10.

mind, when the prospect is actually before us of quitting for ever this transitory world. To a dying man, who is conscious that he is on the point of entering upon another state of existence, which will be unchangeable and eternal, every thing in this world appears unworthy of a moment's thought, in comparison with his future condition. How important is it that we should anticipate that hour which is fast hastening to us all, that we may *give diligence to make our calling and election sure*;⁴⁵ and not find, when it comes upon us, that we have neglected the *one thing needful* for our eternal happiness, the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His salvation. The multitude of mankind set their affection on earthly things exclusively and entirely. It is the duty and privilege of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to *seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God*,⁴⁶ ready to dispense the blessings of His grace to the suplicants at His footstool. If we are *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, this will be the case with us; *our conversation will be in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Colossians iii. 1.

⁴⁷ Philippians iii. 20, 21.

Let us ask ourselves, Is our Christianity of this description? Does it raise our minds to things above, and to realize those which are unseen and eternal? This is what it ought to do. If it does not, we have reason to fear that there is something materially wrong in our religious profession. There is reason to suspect that notwithstanding we may profess to believe the gospel, *the testimony of Christ* has not been received by us into our hearts, and therefore it has not been *confirmed in us*; that we are not established in it, so as to be led to seek earnestly to enjoy its benefits; but that our profession of Christianity is merely a formal and nominal one, from which no real happiness is derived. Do I address any, who are in a measure convinced of the importance of possessing true religion, but are halting between two opinions, vainly striving to serve *God and mammon*, or God and this present evil world? Be assured that you cannot possibly serve two such opposite masters at one and the same time. There is no agreement between them. If then you cleave to the one, you must forsake the other; if you hold to the one, you will despise the other. Inquire then, What can the world give you? What is the real worth of all its gifts, could you obtain your whole desire? All would issue in *vanity and vexation of spirit*. This is all that the votaries of the world toil for. And, oh! what a poor compensation is this for

the loss of the soul. But what will the Lord Jesus Christ give to them that receive His testimony, and are waiting for His coming? Not perishing riches, not fading honours, not cloying pleasures, but *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, which is *reserved in heaven* for them; an *exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Thither let us direct our hopes and expectations, and we shall not meet with disappointment. With what eagerness are the things of this life sought after, amidst innumerable disappointments. But those who *seek first the kingdom of God* will meet with no disappointment. Let them *with patience wait for it*, and in due time they shall receive the inestimable blessing, as *the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*, to His believing people.

The apostle was persuaded, that as the grace of God had begun the good work in the Corinthian believers, it would be carried on until it was completed. He therefore encourages them to rely upon the goodness of God to His children in Christ Jesus, by assuring them that He would also *confirm them unto the end, that they might be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*. So he expresses himself to the Philippians as *being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*. We are indebted to Divine grace at all times for our continual preservation

in the good ways of God, so as to hold out to the end of our earthly course. It is to the grace of God that we must look for our preservation day by day, as long as we live upon earth. *He is able*, as St. Jude declares, *to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.* When the accuser of the brethren brings his charges against us, in order to our condemnation, the only available reply will be, *It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*; it is in Him that we put our trust as *the propitiation for our sins*; and our *Advocate*, as well as our Redeemer. Those who rely on Him shall be *more than conquerors through Him that loved them*; they shall triumph through Christ over all the accusations and malice of Satan; and nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The grace of God, which began and carries on, will complete the good work, until *He shall bring forth the head stone of the spiritual building with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it.* Let this *grace of God, which is given us by Jesus Christ*, be our sole and entire dependence, and we shall have continual cause for thankfulness and praise; and shall be enabled to look beyond this present life to *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, having our hopes directed towards it, as the season of our highest joy and felicity.

SERMON LIV.

FOR

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR.

Ephesians iv. 20, 21.

BUT YE HAVE NOT SO LEARNED CHRIST; IF
SO BE THAT YE HAVE HEARD HIM, AND
HAVE BEEN TAUGHT BY HIM, AS THE
TRUTH IS IN JESUS.

THE conduct which is inconsistent with a profession of Christianity, and that which is agreeable to it, are both enlarged upon by the apostle Paul in the Epistle for this day. The difference between a mere outward profession of faith in Christ, and receiving the truth in the love of it, is pointed out in the plainest manner. We must be taught the truth as it is in Jesus by the demonstration of the Spirit, so as to receive it by the faith of the operation of God, in order to have a right apprehension of it. We must be

willing to learn as scholars, with humility of mind, sensible of our natural ignorance of Divine truth, and praying that we may be taught of God, according to His gracious promise; we must hear and obey the truth, if we would obtain the blessings which it sets before us.

May the Spirit of God be our Teacher, while we meditate upon this portion of His holy word which has been revealed for our admonition, that we may be led to avoid and turn away from every thing that is contrary to His holy mind and will, and to follow all such things as are agreeable to it; and may be blessed by Him in time and in eternity.

It appears, from the manner in which the Epistle for this day commences, that the state of the Gentile world, in the days of the apostles, was most dreadful. It made St. Paul very anxious on behalf of those who were converted to Christianity by his instrumentality, lest they should again be led aside by the evil example of those around them. He therefore speaks in the most solemn and earnest manner, *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk, not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.* He did not think it sufficient merely to make a passing remark on this subject, but he bore his solemn testimony to its importance in such a way, as showed that it demanded their most serious attention; that as they professed

to be Christians, or, in the language of the text, *to have learned Christ, to have heard Him, and to have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus*, their walk or conduct in the world must be different from that of the people among whom they lived.

These Gentiles, or heathens, walked *in vanity*; their minds were filled with it. This character has always been descriptive of the children of this world. Their minds are set upon and take pleasure in vanity and folly; that which is empty, vain, frivolous, and unsatisfying. What is all the display that is made in the world, but a proof of this? *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*⁴⁸ *Surely every man walketh in a vain show.*⁴⁹ How is the vanity of mankind displayed in various ways, in ostentation and false pretences of every kind, mental and bodily! But that to which the apostle refers particularly, he mentions more fully to the Romans, when, speaking of the power of God being visible in the works of creation, he represents the heathen as being *without excuse, because that when they knew God from His works, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful* for the benefits which He conferred upon them, *but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they*

⁴⁸ Ecclesiastes i. 2.

⁴⁹ Psalm xxxix. 6.

*became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things.*⁵⁰ The vanity and folly of the heathen philosophers appeared, in that when they were persuaded that the works of creation gave full evidence of the Almighty power which brought them into existence, instead of worshipping the invisible Being who had made all these things, they were satisfied to worship the works of their own hands; images of their fellow creatures, of dead men, and even of inferior animals. Thus they gave full proof of *having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their heart.* Their minds were blinded by ignorance, and their hearts were hardened; so that love and gratitude to Him *in whom they lived and moved and had their being*, who *giveth to all life and breath and all things*,⁵¹ had no place in them; they would not know Him, they did not love Him.

The apostle goes on to describe the characters of those who *have not learned Christ*, as *being past feeling*, or destitute of it, having no tenderness of conscience respecting right or wrong; and being therefore without any remorse for their wicked conduct. And as the consequence of this, they

⁵⁰ Rom. i. 20—23. ⁵¹ Acts xvii. 25, 28; xxvi. 18. ⁵² Col. i. 13.

had given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. Here we learn that sin against God is not void of criminality, on account of those who commit it being ignorant of what is right. The servant who knows his Master's will, and does it not,⁵⁰ is indeed more culpable; but all sin brings down *the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.* What an awful description is this of the state of the Gentile world! Oh! that Christian lands were free from these vices, which are so decidedly condemned in the word of God. In heathen countries it has always been found that vice reigns triumphant. It is the knowledge of the revealed will of God which alone gives proper feelings on these subjects.

The apostle was thankful that the persons whom he addressed had been better instructed; so that they did not act in the wicked manner that he had described. He said to them in the text, *Ye have not so learned Christ.* The knowledge of Christ Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, had been communicated to them, and it had produced a powerful effect upon them. They had, by the belief of the gospel, been *turned from darkness to light; and from the power of Satan unto God.*⁵¹ They had been *delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.*⁵² They had learned better than to live in sin and wickedness, as the heathen did, among whom they dwelt. We have reason also to be thankful

that we are not in heathen darkness and sin, but that we know better. Let us see to it that our practice corresponds with our profession; lest those who have not our advantages should rise up in judgment against us.

The Christians at Ephesus afforded proof of their learning and proficiency in the school of Christ: *If so be that, or since, ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.* They had heard the word of God with attention, and had not heard it in vain. They had received Divine teaching and instruction, as well as heard with the hearing of the ear. They had attentively listened to the voice of God speaking to them in His holy word. They had been taught *the truth as it is in Jesus*; that Divine truth which is to be known only through Him, which relates to Him, and is made known by the teaching of His Spirit; the truth respecting the Divine method for the pardon of sin and reconciliation with God.

All who anxiously seek and obtain pardon from God, are convinced of the evil and danger of sin, or they would not be desirous of receiving forgiveness. *The truth as it is in Jesus* therefore teaches them that they should *put off, concerning the former conversation*, or their previous course of life, *the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*; their natural carnal inclinations and desires. These must be renounced and put off by the true Christian; they must not be al-

lowed to occupy or dwell in the heart and mind, any more than to appear in the conduct. Whatever pleasures they promise are deceitful, and cause pain in the end ; the stings and accusations of a guilty conscience, which will speak when the mind has received instruction in Divine truth.

All who are reconciled to God, must also be conformed to His holy mind and will; and must therefore *be renewed in the spirit of their mind*. An internal change takes place in those who receive Divine teaching. The apostle says to the Corinthians, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new ; and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.*⁵³ If we are reconciled to God, we shall seek to be pleasing to Him in our hearts, as well as our lives. We shall seek our happiness in the things of God and heaven; and this with regard to the spirit of our mind, which will be under Divine influence, as well as our outward conduct. We shall not follow those *foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*;⁵⁴ they will afford us no enjoyment; but our anxiety will be *to walk so as to please God, and therein to abound more and more*.⁵⁵ We shall therefore *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*. The new man, or new creature, is

⁵³ 2 Cor. v. 17, 18. ⁵⁴ 1 Tim. vi. 9. ⁵⁵ 1 Thess. iv. 1.

*created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*⁵⁶

He is new created after the image and likeness of God, or *in righteousness and holiness of the truth*; or that righteousness and holiness which *the truth as it is in Jesus* alone inculcates, and which the knowledge of this truth communicates for justification before God, and conformity to His holy word and will, which He has been pleased to reveal to mankind for their admonition and instruction.

Respecting the conduct which becomes a profession of Christianity, the apostle proceeds to enlarge, in the remainder of the Epistle for this day, summing it all up with the exhortation which follows, *Be ye therefore followers, or imitators, of God as dear children*;⁵⁶ thus showing that conformity to God is that which is required of all those who are reconciled to Him by faith in Christ Jesus. He says, *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour*. Every kind of falsehood and deceit is to be avoided and renounced by the Christian. He is to speak the truth at all times, in simplicity and godly sincerity. In his spirit there is to be no guile. Our Saviour commended Nathanael for having such a disposition. *Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*⁵⁷ It brings honour to a profession of religion, when uprightness and

⁵⁶ Eph. ii. 10; v. 1. ⁵⁷ John i. 47. ⁵⁸ Titus ii. 10. ⁵⁹ 1 Cor. xii. 16.

integrity, straightforwardness and honesty, mark the character and conduct. Let us seek grace from God to enable us thus to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*.⁵⁸ A reason is given why falsehood should be put away from those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; *for we are members one of another*. Every member of the mystical body of Christ should be concerned for the interest and honour of the whole body, that each in his proper vocation may glorify God. As in the human body, so it ought to be with the body of Christ: *Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it*.⁵⁹ If one who has made a serious profession of religion, and has been supposed to be living under its influence, brings disgrace upon it, all the members of the church of Christ mourn on account of the dishonour done to God, and the cause that is given to the adversary to blaspheme, or speak evil of the way of truth.

Again, it is said, *Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath*. If any occasion of offence arise among the children of God, they should be careful that even just indignation should be kept within due bounds. Anger should be restrained as much as possible, and not be cherished in the mind, or suffered to dwell in it. We are to consider ourselves, lest we also be tempted, and overcome by the as-

saults of our spiritual enemies, so as in our own turn to bring dishonour on our Christian profession. *Neither give place to the devil.* We are to *resist him, stedfast in the faith,*⁶⁰ and then *he will flee from us.*⁶¹ But if we comply with his evil suggestions in one particular, we give him encouragement to continue his temptations; and know not how far we may be led astray. To give way to angry passions, is to fall into the snare of Satan, and give him possession of our hearts. Evil tempers peculiarly mark his power over the mind. An old writer has called man, "half beast, half devil;" the first from our naturally vicious inclinations and practices, or *fleshly lusts, which war against the soul,*⁶² the other, from the evil tempers and passions, which we are prone to indulge. Let us beware of assimilating ourselves to the prince of darkness, by giving way to his evil suggestions and temptations to sin and wickedness. Let us humble ourselves before God whenever evil thoughts or desires arise in our minds; and reflect how unworthy these things manifest us to be, to partake of His goodness. If we have cause to be offended with our fellow creatures, how much more reason has God to be displeased with us. If therefore we need to implore His mercy to pardon our multiplied offences, it be-

⁶⁰ 1 Peter v. 9; ii. 11; iv. 15, 16. ⁶¹ James iv. 7. ⁶² 2 Thess. iii. 10, 12.

comes us to forgive our offending fellow creatures.

It is further said, *Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.* All dishonesty is here forbidden to those who profess to believe the gospel of Christ. How lamentable is it that in a country, professedly Christian, there should be so much reason as there is to complain of the dishonesty that is commonly practised. A dishonest Christian is a contradiction in terms. St. Peter says to believers in Christ, *Let none of you suffer as a thief, or as an evil doer.* This is not to *suffer as a Christian.*⁶⁰ Idleness is also condemned in the word of God. The apostle says on this subject to the Thessalonians, *That if any man would not work, neither should he eat; and commands* those who were disposed to be idle, and *exhorts* them *by the Lord Jesus*, to whom they professed attachment, *that with quietness they should work, and eat their own bread;*⁶² that which became their own by honest industry. But here we learn also, that Christians are not only to labour for their own support, but that they are to do so for a nobler and higher purpose than mere selfishness, even that they *may have to give to him that needeth.* The spirit of charity and love is thus to be manifested among the members of the mystical body of Christ.

They are also to watch over their words, or common language, in the intercourse of society. *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers ;* which is prohibited more plainly in the next chapter ; *But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, that is, licentious conduct, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints ; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient ,*⁶³ but are unfit and unbecoming the Christian character and profession. The edification of all around them should be studied by believers in Christ, in their intercourse with their fellow creatures, that they may be the means of communicating a blessing to them. All improper or unbecoming language, which may contaminate or defile the mind, is to be avoided and discarded, from a principle of the fear of God ; from a conviction that every thing of that kind is displeasing to Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men.⁶⁴ Corrupt speech is a proof that the heart is impure, and therefore not right with God ; that the *mind and conscience is defiled,*⁶⁵ and has not been cleansed by the sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost.

But as these sins to which the apostle refers, were commonly practised in the heathen world,

⁶³ Eph. v. 3, 4 ; i. 13, 14. ⁶⁴ Jer. xvii. 10. ⁶⁵ Titus i. 15.

without shame or hesitation ; in order to guard Christians against them more effectually, lest they should be induced to imitate the evil conduct of the persons among whom they lived, the apostle appeals to them in the most feeling manner : *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.* He speaks of the Holy Spirit after the manner of men, as being grieved with the sinful conduct of those who profess to be the children of God ; and he makes mention of the obligations they are under to Him, as a reason why they should avoid that which is contrary to His holy mind and will, as it is revealed in His blessed word. He had said to them before, *After that ye believed in Christ, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance,*⁶³ a pledge of the blessedness reserved in heaven for the people of God. He here reminds them again of the unspeakable blessing which is bestowed upon the church of Christ, by the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was customary in ancient times to put seals upon evidences of the purchase of property. People knew their own securities by the seal that was put upon them. An interesting circumstance of this kind is mentioned respecting the prophet Jeremiah, (chap. 32) who was directed to purchase a field, of which he had the right of redemption, previous to the Babylonish captivity, for the purpose of affording an

assurance to the people of their restoration again to their own land, after the appointed period of their captivity should have elapsed. Thus believers in Christ are here represented as being *sealed by the Holy Spirit* for His property, or set apart by His grace to be His peculiar people. They have *the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts*.⁶⁶ The love to Him which possesses their souls and conforms them to the will of God, is a pledge to them of their future blessedness. They *are sealed by Him unto the day of redemption*, to that time when all the purposes of our adorable Redeemer, in coming into the world to deliver the captives of sin and Satan from the bondage under which they were held, shall receive their full accomplishment; when they shall be put in possession of the purchased inheritance, of which the gift of the Spirit is to them an earnest and pledge.

To this *day of redemption* our Saviour referred, when He spoke of the time of His second coming. *Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, He said to His disciples, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh*.⁶⁷ For this full accomplishment of the purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ in the final salvation of His people, the church of Christ is represented to

⁶⁶ 2 Corinthians i. 22.

⁶⁷ Luke xxi. 27, 28.

be looking and longing with anxious expectation. *Ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body,*⁶⁸ or that time when the body, being raised from the dust of death, shall be reunited to the living soul, and shall put on incorruption and immortality. Unto this glorious day, *when the Lord Jesus shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe,*⁶⁹ the Holy Spirit seals believers in Christ, marks them for His own, conforms them to His image in holiness, makes them happy in His love, and preserves them by His almighty power. And when that blessed day shall come, they shall see their glorified Redeemer as He is, and shall go to be with Him and like Him for ever in His eternal and glorious kingdom. How desirous ought all who *name the name of Christ* to be, that they may have *the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts*, testifying to them, that in consequence of believing *the record*, or testimony, *which God hath given of His Son*, they *are the children of God*; and if *children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*, who shall *be glorified together*⁶⁸ with Him in His everlasting kingdom.

Having this hope, we should beware of grieving Him to whom we are so deeply indebted for

⁶⁸ Romans viii. 23, 16, 17.

⁶⁹ 2 Thessalonians i. 10.

all His grace and goodness to us, *the Holy Spirit of God*; and should therefore put off every thing that is inconsistent with our Christian profession, as the apostle proceeds to exhort; *Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, or wickedness of every kind.* The indulgence of our natural disposition in these things, is giving place to the devil, and grieving the Holy Spirit. Instead of encouraging or giving way to these evil passions of our fallen nature, Christians are to *be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven them.* The debt of love and gratitude which we owe to our redeeming God and Saviour is such, that it ought continually to humble us, and lead us to imitate the example which He has set us. How great was His kindness and love towards us ungodly sinners, His enemies! Our unworthiness did not prevent Him from manifesting His exceeding great love to man. Let us meditate upon it with gratitude of heart, praying for the teaching of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, and to turn us from the love of sin and every evil way, that we may live as the children of God here upon earth; and *when the glory of Christ our Saviour shall be revealed, we may be glad with exceeding joy.*⁷⁰

SERMON LV.

FOR

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

WALKING CIRCUMSPECTLY.

Ephesians v. 15, 16.

SEE THEN THAT YE WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY,
NOT AS FOOLS, BUT AS WISE, REDEEMING
THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.

THE leading and essential doctrines of Christianity were constantly taught by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They thought it necessary however not only to speak of these doctrines, and the privileges connected with the belief of them, but also to declare that the religion of Christ was designed to counteract altogether the evil passions and propensities of our corrupt nature; and therefore that those who believed *the truth as it is in Jesus*, were bound to conduct themselves differently from the people of the world, and from their own former inclinations

and practices ; so that instead of seeking their gratification in the things of time and sense, it was to be their continual and anxious endeavour *to walk so as to please God*.⁷¹ They were to consider what is the conduct that becometh the children of God, and to seek grace from Him to conform them to His image in holiness, to be as much as possible like Him, that it might be manifest that they were possessed of faith unfeigned ; and that it was not a mere outward profession of religion which they had adopted. The text is an exhortation of this kind, of which the verses that follow, in the Epistle for this day, may be regarded as affording a farther elucidation. May the Spirit of God apply these exhortations of His holy word to our hearts and consciences, that we may live in obedience to them, to the comfort of our souls, and to the glory of His holy name.

The exhortation in the text is founded upon an observation at the close of it: *The days are evil*. The evil that is in the world has ever been a subject of complaint with the children of God. In all ages of the church they have had occasion to deplore it. We hear of it in the days of the patriarchs, in those of the prophets, and in those of the apostles ; from the beginning of the volume of Divine revelation to the end of it. The child-

⁷¹ 1 Thessalonians iv. 1.

ren of God have ever been found in great danger of being contaminated by the evil example of the world. We are naturally disposed to act as we see others do. And sin is so peculiarly fascinating to the children of men, that our Saviour Himself declared its influence would have a most fatal effect upon the professors of the true religion. *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*⁷² We live in a wicked, ensnaring world, and are liable to be turned aside out of the good ways of God by means of the temptations with which we are surrounded, and the natural inclination of our own corrupt hearts. For this reason we are called upon to remember continually that *the days are evil*; that we and all around us are fallen creatures, and that the sins which the people of the world are continually committing without concern, are exceedingly displeasing to Him, who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity*;⁷³ and who will, sooner or later, visit with His just vengeance the guilty and impenitent. St. Peter, at the close of his second epistle, speaks of *the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*;⁷⁴ and from thence takes occasion to warn Christians affectionately and fervently, *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your*

⁷² Matt. xxiv. 12. ⁷³ Hab. i. 13. ⁷⁴ 2 Peter iii. 7, 17.

*own stedfastness.*⁷⁴ The abounding of iniquity should ever be viewed by the Christian with grief and dread ; with grief that any persons around him should be under the influence of that which is so pernicious ; with dread lest he himself, in consequence of the corruption of his nature, should be ensnared by it to the disgrace of his holy profession, and the dishonour of God and His cause. That the apostle's remark applies to the times in which we live, cannot but be acknowledged, when there is so much open contempt for the laws and authority of God to be seen in the world ; when every commandment of the moral law is openly transgressed.

Such being the state of the world, the apostle admonishes or cautions Christians against falling into the common evil practices of those among whom they were conversant. *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.* He intimates that all the workers of iniquity are fools, or unwise ; are acting like persons without understanding. They are seeking happiness in *the pleasures of sin*, which are but *for a season*,⁷⁵ and in exchange for them, are renouncing *fulness of joy* and *pleasures for evermore*.⁷⁶ They are in danger of losing their own souls ; and appear satisfied with gaining only the temporary applause and favour of the world instead of it. Fools in-

⁷⁵ Hebrews xi. 25.

⁷⁶ Psalm xvi. 11.

deed, truly unwise, will those persons prove themselves to have been, who at the great day of account shall be found to have acted in this manner. They are without understanding, for their conduct proves that they *have the understanding darkened through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.*⁷⁷ *They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness.*⁷⁸ To know and to do the will of God is not an object with them. The remedy for this is *walking circumspectly*; which denotes a careful and vigilant inspection into the whole of our conduct; and *redeeming the time*, or setting such a value upon it, that we may apply it to a useful purpose, and not waste it in idleness, or misspend it in the practice of iniquity.

A special mean for avoiding the folly of mankind is, to seek for an acquaintance with the revealed will of God, and a right understanding of it; as the apostle proceeds to exhort, *Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.* Many persons are ignorant of the will of God, because they have no desire to be made acquainted with it. Their minds are set upon something else; their understandings are not exercised upon this subject, and do not enter into it. They have no desire to be informed upon it, in order to be subjected to its directions. Yet

⁷⁷ Ephesians iv. 18.

⁷⁸ Psalm lxxxii. 5.

these unwise persons, and without understanding in the things of God, may be wise and prudent with regard to this world, men of fine parts and excellent understanding on other subjects; and on that very account may be led away by *the vanity of their mind*,⁷⁹ to undervalue what is in reality of the utmost importance in its consequences to themselves, personally considered, and to all the children of men in general. Let us seek for a wise and understanding heart to be given us with regard to the things which belong to our everlasting peace and salvation, that we may know the will of God, as it is revealed in His holy word; and by His grace may be enabled to live in obedience to it, to the happiness of our souls, and the glory of His holy name.

There is another description of persons, who are equally under the influence of evil, as the unwise men of whom we have been speaking; but in a very different way; that is, those who are seeking their happiness in sensual gratifications. Against the conduct of such persons, the apostle warns believers in Christ, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess*. Every kind of excess or licentiousness is opposed to the spirit of true Christianity; and therefore those who are living in excess of any description, in drunkenness and its consequences, dissoluteness and debauchery,

⁷⁹ Ephesians iv. 17.

are living in opposition to the will of God ; and are, by their transgressions, *treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; who will render to every man according to his deeds.*⁸⁰ The natural *desires of the flesh and of the mind,*⁸¹ and the actions which proceed from them are displeasing to God. An admonition is therefore given to Christians to avoid all compliance with their suggestions.

In order to counteract the self-indulgence to which human nature is prone, the apostle exhorts, *Be filled with the Spirit.* The first Christians are frequently spoken of as being *filled with the Holy Ghost.* The Spirit of God dwelt in them, took up His abode in their hearts, and sanctified them. The apostle says to the Corinthians, *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? And again, Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*⁸² To be filled with the Spirit, to have the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart, is the greatest and most unfailing source of happiness that a human being can enjoy. It is said of old, *The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.*⁸³

⁸⁰ Rom. ii. 5, 6. ⁸¹ Eph. ii. 3. ⁸² 1 Cor. iii. 16 ; vi. 19, 20. ⁸³ Acts xiii. 52.

These two go together. The effect produced by the Spirit's influence is holiness of heart and life; the love of sin is mortified, the practice of sin is denied and avoided, and the soul is filled with joy and peace. The fruits of the Spirit abound in the heart, and appear in the life, to the glory of God; and the consolations of God are experienced in the soul. It is said of the early Christian churches, that they *walked in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*.⁸⁴ They walked with God as their Father, and as it became His children to do, cultivating a spirit of filial fear toward Him in their hearts; and they were happy. If the question be asked, How are we to be filled with the Holy Ghost? The answer is supplied from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him*.⁸⁵ What an encouraging promise is this! With what earnestness ought it to lead us to implore this most excellent gift from our heavenly Father, for Christ's sake; that we may possess that strong consolation which is the portion of those who are endued with the Holy Spirit, and enriched with His heavenly grace. The gracious influence of the Holy Ghost promotes both the holiness and happiness of the Christian. Being influenced

⁸⁴ Acts ix. 31.⁸⁵ Luke xi. 13.

from above, he will *walk circumspectly*; his conduct will be correct before the world, as his heart is right with God. From this Divine influence also he will derive special consolation. The reading of the word of God, which *holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*,⁸⁶ will be blessed to his soul in a peculiar manner, in consequence of the teaching of the Holy Spirit applying to his heart the truths therein revealed. In the devotional parts of it especially, he will take great delight, being enabled to make use of the supplications and thanksgivings contained in it as his own language, the utterance of his own heart before God.

Hence the apostle adds, as an effect of being *filled with the Spirit: Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*. The devotional parts of the holy scriptures are here referred to, but more particularly the book of Psalms. It is the privilege of the Christian under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to take up the language of inspiration, and to adopt it as his own, in prayer and praise before God. And it may be truly said, that the book of Psalms has proved to be a fund of delight and consolation to the church of God in all ages. The children of God have often found the lan-

⁸⁶ 2 Peter i. 21.

guage of the Psálms suited to their own case, both in joy and sorrow; so that they have been supported under the afflictive dispensations of Divine Providence, by meditating upon this portion of holy writ; and while they have been repeating the words of Divine inspiration, they have been filled with *joy unspeakable and full of glory*.⁸⁷ St. James says, *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms*.⁸⁸ These Divine productions were penned for the encouragement and consolation of the people of God, that those who have *believed through grace*⁸⁹ might adopt their language, and be comforted in the enjoyment of communion and fellowship with their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus. If the people of the world take pleasure in their foolish, impious, and impure songs, why should not the children of God delight themselves in singing praises to the Lord, in language which has been given in His word for their use and edification?

The exhortation intimates, that the joy of the Christian in the Lord his God is not to be concealed within his own heart. *Speaking to yourselves* means speaking to each other. We are to make the word of God the subject of our rejoicing when we are in company, as well as when we are alone. This is expressed more plainly in the apostle's address to the Colossians, *Let the*

⁸⁷ 1 Peter i. 8.⁸⁸ James v. 13.⁸⁹ Acts xviii. 27.

*word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*⁹⁰ While we use these sacred words, we must remember that it is not the utterance of the lips, but the *melody* of our heart which is pleasing to God. We are to sing *the high praises of God*, imploring His grace to tune our hearts to praise Him in truth, while our lips are employed in giving utterance to the words of gratitude and thankfulness for the blessings which His goodness has bestowed upon us. When the affections of the believer are drawn out towards his Lord and Saviour, so that he can rejoice in the salvation of Christ, and *the high praises of God are in his mouth*,⁹¹ there is a happiness felt in the soul such as the world cannot give ; a happiness which is a foretaste and anticipation of the blessedness of the redeemed around the throne of God in glory. Who has such reason to be joyful as the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ ? While he is *singing with grace in his heart to the Lord*, he has *joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle* ;⁹² joy which the world cannot give or take away. It is the privilege of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to have *joy and peace in believing*⁹³ the promises of His grace, and in relying upon His merits and

⁹⁰ Col. iii. 16. ⁹¹ Psalm cxlix. 6. ⁹² Proverbs xiv. 10.

mediation; and those who do not rejoice in His great salvation, do not live up to their high privilege. With regard to the people of the world, it may be truly said, *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*⁹⁴ but the joy of the Christian knows no end. It brings present peace, and it will be consummated in eternity. *Praise is therefore comely for the upright.*⁹⁵ *The joy of the Lord is their strength*⁹⁶ and their security. While they praise Him, they are happy; and while they sing *with grace in their hearts*, they will live above the world, and will therefore be holy.

As the Christian's song of praise proceeds from a grateful heart, he is called upon to be *giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We are to cultivate a grateful disposition for the goodness of God to us. We are to regard Him, in Christ Jesus, as our almighty and most merciful Father, who waiteth to be gracious, and is ready to show kindness and compassion to His children; who *is rich unto all that call upon Him.*⁹³ This paternal character of Almighty God we should not lose sight of. He is *the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort*⁹⁷ to His children in Christ Jesus. And if we thought more of His goodness and mercy to us, it would lead us to cultivate a more

⁹³ Rom. xv. 13; x. 12. ⁹⁴ Prov. xiv. 13. ⁹⁵ Ps. xxxiii. 1. ⁹⁶ Neh. viii. 10.

grateful disposition towards Him. All the blessings which we enjoy are the gifts of His bounty; and are all of them unmerited on our part. Life and health, and all the comforts of life, proceed from Him. *He giveth to all life and breath and all things.*⁹⁸ How many receive these His benefits with ingratitude, instead of thanking the Giver of every good and perfect gift for giving them *all things richly to enjoy.*⁹⁹ Let us not, while we receive His benefits, be unthankful for them; lest it should be needful for Him to deprive us of them, in order to make us sensible of their value, and of His goodness in bestowing them. Let us seek for the exercise of His paternal care over us, and beseech Him to overrule all that concerns us for His own glory and for our good. And if, as a Father, He is pleased to visit us with affliction; *for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?*¹ let us bow to His sovereign pleasure, and thankfully say, The will of the Lord be done. He knows what is best for all His children; and He will order all things for the best to them that trust in Him. To the God of all grace their thanks are therefore due, because *His mercy endureth for ever.*

As God our Creator and Benefactor, He is to be adored by His creatures. But it is because He, from whom all good proceeds, is our recon-

⁹⁷ 2 Cor. i. 2. ⁹⁸ Acts xvii. 27. ⁹⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 17. ¹ Heb. xii. 7.

ciled Father in Christ Jesus, that the Christian especially praises His holy name. As the Father of mercies, praise and thanksgiving is offered to Him *in the name*, or through the merits and mediation, *of our Lord Jesus Christ*. It is only in Christ that we sinful creatures can behold the God of heaven as our Father; or as having, with regard to us, the bowels of a tender parent towards his offspring. Man, as a sinner, looks upon God Almighty as an object of dread and terror; he fears His power and His justice; he dreads His vengeance. But in Christ Jesus, for His merits' sake, the guilty transgressor sees the sword of Divine Justice laid aside, or put into its scabbard; and mercy looking down upon him with smiles of kindness and compassion. This fills his heart with gratitude, and his tongue with praise; which is *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*,² His beloved Son, whom the Father of heaven gave to be our Redeemer and Mediator; to suffer the penalty due to our transgression of His law, to bear the curse due to our sins; and to be our High Priest and Intercessor; through whose mediation we may present ourselves at His footstool; and pleading His obedience unto death for our justification, may look for every blessing we need at His hands. *The name of our Lord Jesus Christ* ought to be exceedingly pre-

² 1 Peter ii. 5.

cious to us, exceedingly valuable in our estimation, when we think of what He has done for us, and what He is to us, and the great and unspeakable blessings which are promised to be bestowed through Him upon the sinful children of men. We may well say, Blessed be God for Jesus Christ, and the great salvation made known to us in and through Him. May we love His name, and receive the benefits of which He came into the world to be the Author and Giver to the children of men. If Christ be ours, and we are His, it is our privilege to call God our Father, and to look for the exercise of His mercy and compassion towards us, to give thanks to His holy name, to rejoice in the God of our salvation.

And while we do this, we shall endeavour to fill up the stations in which we are placed in this life with humility, as the apostle exhorts: *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.* The fear of God will be the governing principle of our lives, and will actuate us in all our concerns, if we are indeed His children. We shall endeavour to fulfil all relative duties in the fear of God; living in obedience to the laws of God, and of our country, from a principle of regard to the will of our heavenly Father. We shall *submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.* We shall *honour all men; love the brotherhood; fear God; honour the king.*³

In all these respects the believer in Christ will *walk circumspectly*; because he knows that he is living in an evil world. He will endeavour to employ his time, as he may have opportunity, to the glory of God. He will seek to understand the Lord's will, as it is revealed in His holy word, and will pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit to enable him to receive it with pure affection, that he may not live in ignorance and sin. It will be his earnest desire and prayer that he may *be filled with the Holy Ghost*, so as to live under His Divine influence continually. He will consider what cause he has for gratitude to his heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, and will express his thankfulness in songs of praise derived from God's holy word, *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in his heart to the Lord*. And humility will characterize his conduct to others, according to the station which he occupies in society. Let us implore Divine grace to conform us to the mind and will of God, as He has made it known to us in His holy word; that we may live as the *obedient children*³ of God, showing forth His praise and salvation from day to day, to the glory of His holy name.

³ 1 Peter ii. 13, 17; i. 14.

SERMON LVI.

FOR

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

Ephesians vi. 10, 11.

FINALLY, MY BRETHREN, BE STRONG IN THE
LORD, AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT.
PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD, THAT
YE MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE
WILES OF THE DEVIL.

THE exhortation contained in these words intimates to us the weakness of mankind, and the power and subtilty of our spiritual enemies. The apostle had before described all men as being, by nature, *dead in trespasses and sins*; and therefore as *walking* or living openly in the practice of them, *according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*.⁴ The true Christian alone is delivered from this bondage. For he alone can

say with truth, *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness,*⁴ or under the dominion of the wicked one. But as long as the believer in Christ is in this world, he is like a person who is living in an enemy's country, and is obliged to be continually on his guard, lest he should be surprised and overpowered by the usurper, whose tyranny and dominion he has renounced. Blessed be God, He has fully equipped His people for the contest in which they are to be engaged through life. He has provided armour for them which is proof against all the weapons that their adversaries can wield; and He has promised His Divine aid and protection, when they call upon Him for it, where-with they shall be enabled successfully to withstand the violence, and to defeat the stratagems, of their foes; and finally to triumph over all their assaults.

The text makes mention,

First, Of the most subtil and powerful of our spiritual adversaries;

Secondly, Of the method which he employs to seduce mankind; and,

Thirdly, Of the means whereby he may be effectually resisted.

These topics are afterwards spoken of more at large in the remainder of the Epistle for this day.

⁴ Ephesians ii. 1, 2.

⁵ 1 John v. 19.

May we be led, by the consideration of this subject, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, to the exercise of watchfulness and prayer; that as good soldiers of Christ Jesus, we may fight manfully under His banner, and may obtain the victory over sin and Satan, in the strength of the Lord and in the power of His might.

First, The devil is spoken of as an adversary who is to be withstood and resisted by the Christian. He is described in the word of God as the leader in that apostacy of the fallen angels which occasioned their being cast out of heaven, *their own original habitation*, into the dire abode which they now occupy; and where they are *reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.*⁶ These infernal spirits, however, exercise their baneful influence upon the inhabitants of this world. The apostle shows that by *the devil* he did not mean merely one individual, but innumerable hosts of evil spirits which infest our fallen world. For he adds, *We wrestle, not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness, or wicked spirits, in high places.* Here the vast power of our spiritual adversaries is intimated, and the severity of the contest in which the Christian is engaged with them. To *the wiles of the devil* the fall of our first parents is attributed. His malice against

the Most High is unbounded, and is exerted in every possible way ; for which his vast intellectual endowments afford him great facilities. His rage is peculiarly directed against our Lord Jesus Christ, the Seed of the woman, whose heel or human nature he was to be permitted to bruise ; and against all those who *are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*. These persons especially he and his emissaries are continually endeavouring to seduce and subvert. For this purpose they are *going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it*.⁷ He is described by St. Peter as our *adversary the devil*, who, *as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*.⁸ The method, whereby he seduces mankind, is to be noticed in the

Second place. This is called in the text, *the wiles of the devil*. Craftiness and subtilty are the arts which he uses principally to effect his purposes. He frequently succeeds with mankind by calling *evil good and good evil*, by putting *darkness for light and light for darkness*, or *bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*.⁹ He observes the different dispositions of the children of men, and suits his temptations to their various tastes and circumstances. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is still successfully presented to many, who thus become ac-

⁶ Jude 6. ⁷ Job i. 7. ⁸ 1 Peter v. 8. ⁹ Isaiah v. 20.

quainted with evil in the most painful manner ; as our first parents were, who did not know what evil was until bitter experience informed them of its fatal effects. To those who have been withheld from sinful indulgences, by the restraints of good education, he magnifies the advantage of obtaining that liberty to sin of which they have been hitherto deprived, or the happiness to be found in the knowledge of evil. To those who have been accustomed to sit in the lap of indulgence, he suggests plausible excuses for the furtherance of their evil desires. The voluptuous, the covetous, the ambitious, are each supplied with allurements adapted to their several inclinations. The Christian being the subject of a depraved nature, is exposed to the temptations of this subtil and powerful adversary. Inherent corruption incapacitates him for resistance to *the wiles of the devil*. The carnal mind is pleased with those things which are contrary to the will of God. Hence arises the warfare in the Christian between the flesh and the spirit ; the law in the members and the law of the mind striving and struggling together for the mastery. Satan uses all his wiles, all his crafty ways, to harden the hearts of men against the fear of God, and to betray them into sin ; knowing that while sin is indulged, his authority is retained, the transgressor is safe under his controul, being tied and bound with the chain of his sins. All who are

THEY ARE NOT DECEIVED BY THE WILES OF THE DEVIL. The true Christian alone withstands him. But it is not by his own might or power that he is able to do this. His own human strength for this contest is weakness. Therefore he has need to pray continually, *that he will not be tempted, but deliver him from all temptation, from the evil of sin, and the power of the evil one.* The only means by which Satan and his angels can be effectually resisted, is that which is recommended in the text. The apostle says, *My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.* This is the

Third point to be considered. Divine strength alone, the mighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace is sufficient for them that trust in Him, whose strength is made perfect in their weakness, is adequate to enable us to resist the devil, and to strive against sin with effect. Without this aid, all attempt at resistance is futile. But those who earnestly seek help of the Lord against the mighty power of Satan and his angels, shall obtain it. Watchfulness and circumspection are to be united with faith and prayer. Without this, it is intimated, we cannot possibly *withstand in the evil day.*

The apostle says, *Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.*

¹⁰ Matthew vi. 13.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians xii. 9.

We must be equipped with *the whole armour of God* in order to be able *to stand* with confidence, and to *wrestle* in close conflict with our subtil and powerful adversary. Without this protection we cannot come to close quarters with him, and maintain our ground. The apostle enters into particulars respecting the various pieces of Divine armour, with which the Christian is to be clad for his protection against the wiles and assaults of the devil. He says, *Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.* This is supposed to refer to the ancient and eastern habit of wearing loose flowing garments. These were girded up about the loins when they engaged in any business which required activity. It is also said that soldiers usually wore a girdle to keep their armour together, and to carry their weapons. In order that we may stand in the evil day, our *loins* must be *girt about*, or encircled, *with truth.* This may denote the necessity of self-denial with regard to all those corrupt affections which are natural to fallen man. It is principally by means of these, called by St. Peter *fleshly lusts*, or carnal desires, *which war against the soul*,¹² that Satan assaults mankind. These afford an inlet to his temptations, by which he obtains access to the minds of men. To caution us against complying with them, our Saviour reminds us, *I am He that searcheth the hearts and reins.*¹³ But here the girdle of truth is spoken of as the means of pre-

servation from the assaults of our spiritual adversaries. The Christian is to be fortified in his mind by the knowledge of *the truth as it is in Jesus*, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby he is enabled to *put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*;¹⁴ and his affections are raised from earthly to heavenly things; from grovelling here below, to *seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God*.¹⁵ Without self-denial, or mortifying the members of the earth, there is no possibility of withstanding *the wiles of the devil*. St. Peter therefore exhorts Christians to *gird up the loins of their mind, and be sober*,¹² or vigilant against their spiritual enemy.

Connected with this is, *having on the breastplate of righteousness*. This is elsewhere termed *the breastplate of faith and love*. The breastplate is that piece of armour which covers the heart. The righteousness which preserves the heart from injury is the righteousness of Christ. This is embraced by faith, and held fast by love. Faith in Christ as the Lord our righteousness, our strength and our Redeemer, and love to Him on account of what He has done for us, and is to us, is the believer's safeguard from all the attacks which Satan may make upon his heart. Nothing else but faith in the righteousness and redemption

¹² 1 Peter ii. 11; i. 13. ¹³ Rev. ii. 23. ¹⁴ Eph. iv. 21, 22. ¹⁵ Col. iii. 1.

of Christ will protect him from the charges which the accuser of the brethren brings against him, and to the truth of which his own conscience cannot but assent. Some persons understand by *the breastplate of righteousness*, uprightness of heart before God. But however needful this may be, as it assuredly is a matter of the utmost importance to be maintained by the believer in Christ, such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, that this uprightness cannot be relied on as a defence from *the wiles of the devil*. When the Christian is assaulted by the temptations of Satan, it were no wonder if he should sometimes even suspect himself to be a hypocrite; since there is so much corruption within him, of which he is painfully sensible. But when he looks to the righteousness of Christ, he sees that to be all-sufficient for his preservation in the Divine favour; so that relying upon it, he may draw nigh to God at all times with his humble supplications and thanksgivings, notwithstanding the evils which he feels and deplors in his own heart, and which otherwise would prevent him from presuming to go into the Divine presence, because of his personal unworthiness. But trusting to the righteousness of his Redeemer, *which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe*,¹⁶ he looks up with confidence to

¹⁶ Romans iii. 22.

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gospel of Christ communicates to them that believe it with all their hearts. The Psalmist could say, *I will run in the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.*¹⁹ If we enjoy peace with God through believing the gospel of Christ, we *shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not faint* in His holy ways.²⁰

The apostle proceeds: *Above all, or rather, over all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.* The shield of faith, which the Christian is to have in his hand, or to bear on his arm, which he is to hold up against all the weapons of his spiritual enemy, is confidence in God, a reliance on His protection, an assurance that He will not fail nor forsake them that trust in Him, but will protect them in the time of need, because *He is faithful that hath promised.* In the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, we learn what the saints of God under the old testament dispensation were enabled to do and to suffer by means of faith. *They endured as seeing Him who is invisible,*²¹ and pressed forward in the narrow way to the kingdom of heaven. With this faith they were *able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.* Powerful and furious as Satan is, his assaults are all in vain against those who *have faith in God.* The believer may joyfully sing, *God is our refuge*

²⁰Is. xl. 31. ²¹Heb. x. 23; xi. 27. ²²Ps. xli. 1, 2. ²³Rom. viii. 31, 37.

*and strength, a very present help in trouble ; therefore will we not fear.*²² *If God be for us, who can be against us ? We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*²³ He calls upon us, *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*²⁴ It is only by that faith which realizes the Divine presence, and depends upon the Divine power, that we can *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might*, so as to triumph over all the assaults of our spiritual enemies.

The next exhortation of the apostle is, *And take the helmet of salvation*, or, as he explains it in another place, *Put on for a helmet the hope of salvation.*²⁵ The helmet is that which covers the head and protects it from injury. The hope of salvation through Christ should ever make the Christian lift up his head with confidence and joy. He has a *hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*²⁶ This hope is to be encouraged and strengthened day by day, until it arrive at the full assurance of *hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto him at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*²⁷ For then indeed he shall lift up his head, because he shall then receive *the adoption, to wit, the redemption of his body ; being delivered from the bondage of corruption, and admitted into the glorious liberty*

²⁴ Rev. ii. 10. ²⁵ 1 Thess. v. 8. ²⁶ Titus i. 2. ²⁷ 1 Peter i. 13.

of the children of God. While he is looking upward and forward with this *hope of salvation*, the *things of this present time* will be regarded as *not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in him*,²⁸ *when Christ who is the life of his soul shall appear*, and he *shall also appear with Him in glory*.²⁹

By the various pieces of the armour of God which have been specified, the Christian soldier is equipped from head to foot for defence against his powerful foe. His head is protected by *the hope of salvation*. His heart is defended by the infinitely perfect *righteousness* of his Redeemer securing him in the enjoyment of the love of God, and union and communion with Him. His *loins* are *girt about with the truth* as it is in Jesus, so that he is enabled to *run with patience* and activity *the race that is set before him*.³⁰ His *feet* are set at liberty by *the gospel of peace* to walk in the ways of God's commandments. His whole person is shielded by faith in God as his reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. Thus he is covered in the day of battle; so that *the fiery darts of the wicked one* are warded off from him, and prevented from inflicting the deadly wound, which they would otherwise make. But he is not only furnished with defensive armour for his protection, he is also supplied with offensive

²⁸ Rom. viii. 23, 21, 18. ²⁹ Col. iii. 4. ³⁰ Heb. xii. 1.

weapons, by the use of which he puts to flight his adversary.

The apostle adds, *And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* With this sword Satan was foiled, when he assaulted our blessed Saviour in the wilderness. *It is written,* was the reply made by Christ to every temptation of the devil. And in this He hath left *us an example, that we should follow His steps,*³¹ and be assured of success by the same means. The holy scriptures were revealed for this purpose, that by the knowledge of the doctrines and precepts contained in them, *the man of God may be perfect,* being *thoroughly furnished unto all good works,*³² and thus be able to *overcome the wicked one.* Hence appears the importance of diligently searching the holy scriptures, and treasuring up the word of God in our minds, that being encouraged by it we may *resist the devil*; being assured that *the God of peace will bruise Satan under our feet,*³³ and not suffer him to prevail against us.

Another offensive weapon is added by the apostle, which has been called, "All prayer;" as the Christian is directed to be *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.* Satan has ever found this to be a most formidable

³¹ 1 Peter ii. 21. ³² 2 Tim. iii. 17. ³³ Rom. xvi. 20.

weapon, the force of which he is unable to withstand. The Psalmist could say, *When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemy turn back ; this I know, for God is for me.*³⁴ The Christian warrior fights best upon his knees. Then it is that his armour is impenetrable. Then every part of it is kept bright, and in full use and exercise. In prayer he enjoys a hope of salvation. In it he finds the blessedness of being interested in the righteousness of his Redeemer, since he is *made accepted in the Beloved.*³⁵ By prayer he is led to cleave to the truth, and to abhor all false ways. By prayer his goings are established in the good ways of God, and he enjoys the consolations of the gospel of peace. By prayer his confidence in God is increased. By prayer he wields the shield of faith, which quenches *all the fiery darts of the wicked one.* By prayer also he unsheathes the sword of the Spirit, and ascertains the power of the word of God to support him in the conflict in which he is engaged ; and he is assured that this word will hereafter be fulfilled in the eternal confusion and destruction of Satan, and his agents and followers.

To his prayers for himself, the Christian is directed to add *supplication for all saints ;* for all the children of God ; for all who have God for their Father, and are looking forward to heaven

³⁴ Psalm lvi. 9.

³⁵ Ephesians i. 6.

as their home; all who are living in the world as a holy people unto the Lord their God, the whole family and household of faith, who are engaged in the same spiritual warfare with himself against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And especially he is commanded to pray for the ministers of the gospel of Christ; as the apostle said, *And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.* The success of the gospel in the world is the anxious desire of the true Christian; and therefore he will pray earnestly for those who minister the word of life to their fellow creatures, and especially for those on whose ministry he may himself attend. *Brethren, pray for us.*³⁶ We need your prayers for our encouragement, and the strengthening of our hands in the work of the Lord. Pray then for us, while you pray for yourselves. *Pray that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified;*³⁷ that many may believe and obey it, may be comforted by it, and eternally saved. Pray for yourselves, for all saints, for the ministers of Christ, for the spread of the gospel; and your prayer shall not be in vain. It shall be heard, and in due time shall be turned into praise.

³⁶ 1 Thessalonians v. 25.

³⁷ 2 Thessalonians iii. 1.

SERMON LVII.

FOR THE

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GROUND OF CONFIDENCE.

Philippians i. 6.

BEING CONFIDENT OF THIS VERY THING,
THAT HE WHICH HATH BEGUN A GOOD
WORK IN YOU WILL PERFORM IT UNTIL
THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST.

IT is delightful to observe the affection that subsisted between the apostle Paul, and the churches which he had planted by the preaching of the gospel of Christ. In the Epistle for this day he makes mention of his thanksgivings and his prayers on behalf of the church which had been formed at Philippi by his instrumentality, or in consequence of his having preached the gospel at that place. He commences it by saying, *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.* When he thought of them he remembered the

sufferings which he had endured there in the cause of Christ; he remembered also the wonderful interference of God on behalf of His servants, the gracious manifestation of His presence, which led them to sing praises to God, even in the dungeon into which they had been thrust; he remembered the deliverance which had been granted to them, and all the circumstances that attended it, in causing the conversion of the gaoler and his family; and doubtless also of other persons whose attention was directed to the doctrine of Christ, by means of the miraculous power displayed in favour of His persecuted servants. Every remembrance of these things filled his heart with gratitude to God; and he was accustomed to express his thankfulness for the Divine goodness continually. *Always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy.* Whenever he prayed for them, praise and thanksgiving ascended together with his supplications. When he bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to ask for blessings to be bestowed upon those who had received benefit from his ministry, he also offered up his thanksgivings for all the favours which Divine bounty and goodness had conferred upon them. He reflected on the blessings which they had received with joy and gladness of heart; not only on account of the manifest tokens of Divine favour which had been displayed at the time when

he was present with them; but altogether, as he adds, *For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.* He thanked God that they had embraced the gospel, and had *continued* to adhere *stedfastly* to the cause of God, and *the apostles' doctrine and fellowship*,³⁸ notwithstanding the persecutions to which they were exposed on account of their profession of Christianity. It is a great encouragement to the ministers of the gospel of Christ, to see that those to whom they make known the word of life, *continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which they have heard.*³⁹

What the apostle had witnessed respecting them, led him to express, in the text, his confidence with regard to the future. *Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* Divine grace had begun, and therefore would carry on and complete the work. It was the work of God which had been begun in them; and consequently, it would not be left unfinished. He who had *laid the foundation*, would *bring forth the head stone with shoutings of grace, grace, unto it.*⁴⁰ And this, not only with regard to a few individuals among them, but to all who had truly embraced the gospel of Christ: as he added, *Even as it is meet for me to think this*

³⁸ Acts ii. 42. ³⁹ Colossians i. 23. ⁴⁰ Zechariah iv. 7, 9.

of you all, because I have you in my heart; inas-much as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. His bonds, and their sympathy with him in his affliction, had endeared them to him. He felt therefore a strong affection for them. They had also shown themselves not uninterested in his cause, when he stood on his defence before the people; as well as when the word of the truth of the gospel had received Divine confirmation, by means of the power of God being manifested as engaged to protect and preserve His servants. They had thus proved themselves to be partakers of the same Divine grace as had been bestowed upon him. And as he had been the instrument through which the blessing had been communicated to them, he was most anxiously desirous of their spiritual welfare.

He could appeal to the Searcher of hearts with regard to the great interest which he felt in the promotion of it. *For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.* How strong and ardent was the affection which prompted him to speak in this forcible manner! What compassion for perishing sinners was ever exhibited by our blessed Saviour in the days of His flesh! How affecting His address when, descending the mount of Olives, *He was come near, and beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in*

*this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes.*⁴¹ How kind is the language of the Lord God to His afflicted people. When *Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me*: He graciously replied, *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.*⁴² So it is said respecting our Lord Jesus Christ, our great *High Priest that is passed into the heavens, the Son of God*: *We have not a High Priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; and in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.*⁴³ Such are the bowels of *Jesus Christ*. His infinite compassion and kindness towards His church and people are such as are no where else to be found, such as were never manifested by any other. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*⁴⁴ The apostle Paul expressed his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of the Galatians, in similar language with this towards the Philippians. He addressed them, *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.*⁴⁵

⁴¹ Luke xix. 41. ⁴² Is. xlix. 14. ⁴³ Heb. iv. 14; ii. 18. ⁴⁴ Rom. v. 8.

And as our Saviour showed His love to His church by giving Himself for it, so the apostle says of himself to the Colossians respecting his own willingness to suffer, in order that he might make known the gospel of Christ : *I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the church.*⁴⁶ And he declares to Timothy, *I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*⁴⁷ And in still stronger language he professes to the Philippians, *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.*⁴⁸

After having expressed his thankfulness to God on their behalf, and his anxiety for their spiritual welfare, his great longing after it, he mentions the subject of his supplications for them at the throne of grace. *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.* Wherever true faith in Christ exists in the heart, *it worketh by love*; it produces love to God and His people in particular; and also universal benevolence. But it is not a blind love; it is a love confirmed and increased and established by *knowledge and judgment*. The knowledge of Christ, as the Saviour of sinners, and the perception of His wonderful

⁴⁵ Gal. iv. 19. ⁴⁶ Col. i. 24. ⁴⁷ 2 Tim. ii. 10. ⁴⁸ Phil. ii. 17.

love, and the greatness of His salvation, is the foundation upon which it is built. And this knowledge is to be increased by an acquaintance with the revelation of the Divine will, by searching the holy scriptures, and exercising the judgment upon them, and praying for a right understanding of Divine truth, as it is revealed in the word of God; that by this means we may be led to love Him, because He first loved us;⁴⁹ and thus by reason of use may have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil.⁵⁰ From this would follow that for which the apostle prays, *That ye may approve things that are excellent.* As he himself showed that he did, when he said, *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.*⁵¹ He had proved the religion of Christ, and found it to be most excellent and valuable; *more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*⁵² And he was anxious that all who were made acquainted with it might, in like manner, ascertain its excellence in consequence of love to Christ abounding in them. This he knew would produce a powerful effect upon their conduct. And therefore he prayed that they

⁴⁹ 1 John iv. 19. ⁵⁰ Heb. v. 14. ⁵¹ Phil. iii. 8, 9. ⁵² Psalm xix. 10.

might *be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ*, avoiding all hypocrisy and falsehood and insincerity, all false pretences, which are so common in the world; and, as he afterwards exhorted them, might *be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.*⁵³ To avoid giving needless offence to any is the duty of the children of God. But if the cross of Christ gives offence to the children of this world, and they take offence at it, St. Peter says, *If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.* At the same time he warns believers against that conduct which would bring a reproach upon the gospel of Christ. *Let none of you suffer as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy body or meddler in other men's matters.*⁵⁴ This Christian spirit and conduct is to be observed *till the day of Christ*; that is, as long as we live in this world, until death come, which will be succeeded by the judgment of the great day.

And the love of Christians to their Lord and Master is to be manifested still further, by *being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God.* The fruits of righteousness are otherwise termed

⁵³ Philippians ii. 15, 16.

⁵⁴ 1 Peter iv. 15, 16.

*the fruit of the Spirit, which is in all goodness and righteousness and truth ; and consist in love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*⁵⁵ These are the fruits which are to appear in the conduct of those who, *being justified by faith, have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,*⁵⁶ *and walk humbly with Him, as His obedient children.* They who live *as seeing Him who is invisible*, will reflect His image ; they will be, in a measure, made like to Him ; *with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord*, they will be *changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*⁵⁷ Believers in Christ indeed *now see* only by faith, or *through a glass, darkly* ; but when faith shall be turned into sight, and they shall see Him face to face, it is declared, that they *shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is.*⁵⁸ This *faith* however, which is *of the operation of God* in the heart, as it is the means of bringing the soul nigh to God, produces an entire change in the heart and life. Their affections are set upon their proper object, God in Christ ; and the whole soul is brought under a right influence, that of the Holy Spirit. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new ; and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto Himself by*

⁵⁵ Gal.v. 22, 23. ⁵⁶ Rom.v. 1. ⁵⁷ 2 Cor. iii. 18 ; v. 17, 18. ⁵⁸ 1 John iii. 2.

*Jesus Christ.*³⁷ Reconciliation with God gives a new aspect to every thing. The Lord Jesus Christ, through whom this reconciliation is made, is the object of supreme affection for His great love wherewith He loved us ; and the glory and praise of God our heavenly Father is that which the believer in Christ desires to be the instrument of promoting to the utmost of his power.

We have seen that it was the prayer of the apostle on behalf of the Philippian Christians, that they might know and love God ; that they might enjoy the happiness consequent upon it ; and might live in obedience to His holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life ; that God might in all things be glorified in them and by them. This should be our prayer for ourselves ; and our earnest desire and aim at all times. While we profess to be Christians, we should seek grace from God to enable us to act consistently with our religious profession. Our character and conduct should correspond with each other. We should walk humbly with our God, and circumspectly before men.

Let us now consider more particularly the declaration of the apostle in the text. He expresses,

First, His confidence respecting the persons whom he addressed ;

Secondly, The ground on which it rested, or the cause of it ;

Thirdly, Its ultimate object, or to what it looked forward.

May the present and eternal blessings here spoken of be our portion. May the Holy Spirit influence our hearts by His grace, that we may at length receive the end of our faith, the eternal salvation of our souls.

First, The apostle expresses his confidence respecting the Philippians, in consequence of what he had seen and known of them. He had preached to them the gospel of Christ with much contention and earnestness, in the midst of great opposition, and with considerable success. The effect produced by his preaching was particularly evident in the cases of Lydia, and the gaoler. Of the former it is recorded, that *the Lord opened her heart, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul*. Of the latter, that *he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house*.⁵⁹ In one case the *still small voice*⁶⁰ of the Spirit of God was heard in the heart, and its silent working, though imperceptible, was most powerful and decisive; an entire change of mind and conduct was the result. In the other, the strong hold of Satan was, as it were, taken by storm, and the enemy of souls was compelled at once to make an unwilling surrender of his prey. These were only different specimens of the effect produced by the

⁵⁹ Acts xvi. 14, 34.

⁶⁰ 1 Kings xix. 12.

preaching of the gospel of Christ. Similar effects of the power of Divine grace were evidently manifested in other persons, of which sufficient proof is afforded, by mention being made of *the bishops and deacons* who had been appointed to minister to the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.⁶¹ The apostle saw that they made a profession of having believed the gospel of Christ, and that their walk and conduct were consistent with it. Hence he was led to express his confidence respecting them. But it was not on these circumstances that his confidence was grounded. The text informs us,

Secondly, Whence it was derived. It proceeded from the knowledge that *a good work* had been begun in them, which had God for its Author. Here was firm ground for confidence. He contemplated the Divine workmanship with the utmost satisfaction. The change which had taken place in them had been great and wonderful. They had been *turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God; from idols, to serve the living and true God.*⁶² The gospel had come unto them *not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance* of its truth; and the result had been that the *work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,*⁶³ had been manifested by them.

⁶¹ Phil. i. 1. ⁶² Acts xxvi. 18. ⁶³ 1 Thess. i. 5, 3; ii. 13.

Let us ask ourselves, Has this good work been begun in us, in our hearts? What evidence have we of it? It is a work which operates internally as well as externally. *The word of God effectually worketh in them that believe it.*⁶³ Where this *good work* is manifest, God is its Author; His grace influences the heart, and actuates the conduct. It is from Him that "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, do proceed." In order to ascertain whether this good work has been begun in us, or not, we must examine our principles as well as our conduct. For in consequence of the general profession of Christianity among us, many things are done by those who are not under the influence of Divine grace, which they would not otherwise do. The profession of Christianity raises the tone of moral feeling in the community. We must therefore examine our works by the test of God's holy word, as to their nature, to see if they correspond with it; and then inquire, Whether love to God is the cause of them; or, they spring from love to Him? God is certainly the Author of those works which are done from love to Him. And if He influence us by His grace, we shall most assuredly be anxious to do all those good works which He hath prepared for His people to walk in. But if His whole revealed word and will be not the rule of our conduct, there is great reason to question whether God be the Author of them, however

highly they may be esteemed and commended by our fellow creatures. The apostolical direction is, that *as we have received* from the revelation of the Divine will, *how we ought to walk and to please God, so we should abound more and more.* If *to please God* be our object in truth, then His glory will be our end and aim.

From the works of the Philippians, the apostle was confident that God had *begun a good work* in them; and from thence he was further confident that their profession of religion would not fall off, like that of the stony-ground hearers, but would continue to the end; or that He would *perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* This was the ultimate object to which his confidence looked forward; which is to be noticed in the

Third place. What God begins He will perform, or accomplish, or carry on, to the end. What an encouraging declaration is this! When the humble believer in Christ considers his own weakness, and the power of his spiritual enemies, there seems great reason to fear lest he should not hold out or endure to the end. He who is best acquainted with the workings of his own heart, will be the most diffident on this subject, will be most prone to distrust himself. But what consolation is to be derived from the thought, that if the desires of our souls be to His name, and the remembrance of Him, in whom we put our trust for pardon and salvation, it was Divine

grace which begun the work, and will therefore carry it on until it is completed. So the apostle found when the messenger of Satan was permitted to buffet him. He sought Divine aid, and received an answer from the Lord Christ, *My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness.* He was therefore no longer discouraged by the sense of his own weakness, but only anxious that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Then he could say, *When I am weak, then am I strong.*⁶⁴ His weakness led him to *put on the whole armour of God*, which was provided for his use, and then he was *strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might,*⁶⁵ and therefore able to resist all the temptations and assaults of the enemy of his soul.

It is thus, by the use of the appointed means, that the work of God is carried on in the hearts of His believing people to its completion; or until it shall be consummated in *the day of Jesus Christ*; or of His appearing, *when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day.*⁶⁶ This is the glorious period to which the expectations of the people of God are directed. And having their hopes fixed upon the blessedness which will then be bestowed upon them, their profession is, *Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look*

⁶⁴ 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. ⁶⁵ Eph. vi. 11, 10. ⁶⁶ 2 Thess. i. 10.

*for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.*⁶⁷ The more the Christian looks to heaven as his home, and to the appearing of Jesus Christ as the consummation of his bliss, the more he will desire to be conformed to the Divine image. While he is *looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,*⁶⁸ love and gratitude will constrain him to seek to be *filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.* Let us look forward with more earnest expectation to this glorious period, believing that then all the promises of God in His holy word will be fulfilled to His believing people to the joy of their souls. And having this confidence, let us press forward in the narrow way to the kingdom of heaven, seeking His grace to enable us to love Him above all things, to live to His glory, and show forth His praise; that we may rejoice in His salvation, and those who surround us may be led to embrace it, by witnessing its effects in our life and conduct.

⁶⁷ Philippians iii. 20, 21.⁶⁸ Titus ii. 13, 14.

SERMON LVIII.

FOR

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN.

Philippians iii. 20, 21.

FOR OUR CONVERSATION IS IN HEAVEN, FROM
WHENCE ALSO WE LOOK FOR THE SAVIOUR,
THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

IN these words are described the Christian's manner of life, or the governing principle of his conduct; and his expectations with regard to futurity. When the apostle Paul spoke of the conduct which becomes a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he thought it needful to show that he was anxious to inculcate upon others only that which he himself practised. It is most important that those who are placed in the eminent station of overseers of the flock of Christ, should exemplify in their own persons the precepts which they inculcate upon others. Unless this

be the case, it is to be feared that they are not partakers of a living faith in the Saviour for themselves; since *the fruit of the Spirit*, the effect of being reconciled to God and at peace with Him, does not appear in their life and conduct. The portion of holy writ to which our attention is now to be directed, bears upon this subject; let it be our prayer that we may so meditate upon it, that, by the Divine blessing, we may be enabled to walk humbly with our God here on earth, and to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*, that we may also *rejoice in hope of partaking of the glory of God* hereafter.

The apostle Paul commences the Epistle for this day with calling upon believers in Christ to be followers or imitators of his walk or conduct in the world: *Brethren, be ye followers together of me; and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.* By appealing in this manner to his own conduct, he shows the necessity there is, that those who preach the gospel should be themselves examples to the flock which is committed to their charge, and of which they have taken upon themselves the oversight. But that this is not to be effected without self-denial, or the mortifying of the evil propensities of our corrupt nature, and resisting the temptations of the devil, appears from his declaration to the Corinthians, *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have*

*preached to others, I myself should be a castaway;*⁶⁹ or should be disapproved of God, and a disgrace to my holy profession. It was because of his anxiety to *seek the profit of many that they might be saved*, that he was careful not to place any stumbling-block in their way, which might hinder their reception of the gospel of Christ, or cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of, as though it were not *the way of holiness*.⁷⁰ And for this reason also, when he exhorted them, *Be ye followers of me*, he added, *even as I also am of Christ*.⁶⁹ He was sensible of his own deficiencies, and therefore he set before them a more worthy and more bright example; a perfect pattern, which he desired for himself closely to copy, and to have them to imitate it likewise. He did not desire to be imitated further than as he himself was a follower of Christ. Christ was the pattern which he proposed to himself for imitation, and which he recommended others to follow in like manner as he did. And he wished honour to be given to those who followed the Christian example which he set them; since they afforded evidence that they had *not received the grace of God in vain*.⁷¹

The need there was of his exhortation to consistency of conduct in professors of Christianity, appears from the observation which accompanied

⁶⁹ 1 Cor. ix. 27; x. 33; xi. 1. ⁷⁰ Isaiah xxxv. 8. ⁷¹ 2 Cor. vi. 1.

it: *for many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ*, while they seemed to be numbered among its friends. Even in the first ages of the church, amidst all the ignominy and reproach to which professors of Christianity were exposed; even then, not a few, but many, attached themselves to the church of Christ from corrupt motives. One would have thought that the persecution to which Christians were continually liable in those times, would have deterred false professors from uniting with them, but it did not. In spite of this, *false brethren came in privily*, or were *unawares brought in*⁷² among them; who disgraced their religious profession by acting in a manner which was inconsistent with it. This made the apostles of Christ most earnest in their exhortations that those who embraced the gospel of Christ should *be careful to maintain good works*,⁷³ that they might not be unfruitful members of His church. St. Paul addressed the Thessalonians, *We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you, by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more; for ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus*.⁷⁴ And with regard to his own conduct he reminded them, *Ye know how we exhorted and entreated and*

⁷² Gal. ii. 4. ⁷³ Titus iii. 8. ⁷⁴ 1 Thess. iv. 1; ii. 11, 12. ⁷⁵ Phil. i. 27.

*charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory.*⁷⁴ Those professors of Christianity whose walk or conduct was thus regulated by the *commandments of the Lord Jesus*, were alone worthy of the name; for they alone *adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour*,⁷⁵ their *conversation* alone was such as *becometh the gospel of Christ*.⁷⁵

The apostle, having manifested his deep concern on account of the evil conduct of many who made a profession of Christianity, declares to them that such a profession would profit them nothing; that it would not prevent their perdition. On the contrary he says of them, *Whose end is destruction*. Let those who call themselves Christians observe this. The *end* of those who, while they name the name of Christ, do not depart from iniquity, *is destruction*; they will perish everlastingly, notwithstanding the salvation of Christ is made known to them, and they profess to believe in His name. Such is the statement of the apostle. Is it not needful that it should be plainly declared, when we see those who bear the Christian name act in a manner the very opposite to that which is required by the gospel of Christ? All who live in sin while they call themselves Christians, are acting the part of *enemies of the cross of Christ*, however they may wish to be regarded as its friends.

The apostle describes the character of these persons, by saying of them, *whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*. Their great desire is self-gratification instead of self-denial; earthly pleasures are the whole object of their pursuit instead of heavenly joys. And here we may observe what it is that generally draws men aside, and what we have most reason to guard against. The things of time and sense so captivate multitudes, that for the sake of them they lose their own souls; not regarding the solemn inquiry of our blessed Saviour, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*⁷⁶ That is in truth our god, which we are most desirous to please; or, as the apostle states it, *His servants ye are, to whom ye obey*.⁷⁷ If we follow the dictates of our corrupt nature, for the gratification of its appetites, we make a god of our belly. If we comply with the evil suggestions of Satan, we make him our god by obeying his commands. How awful is the state of those *who profess that they know God, but in works deny Him*. They are described as *being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate*.⁷⁸ And are there not some persons who call themselves Christians, *whose glory is in their shame*;

⁷⁶ Matthew xvi. 26.⁷⁷ Romans vi. 16.⁷⁸ Titus i. 16.

or in that of which they have reason to be ashamed? What depravity is this! How hardened in iniquity do these men discover themselves to have become? The natural course of sin is from bad to worse. When it is not mortified, when its solicitations are not denied, it will obtain the ascendancy; and at length will so completely infatuate the mind, that what was once dreaded, is gloried in. For one who has made a serious profession of religion to have arrived at this state, is most awful. St. Peter says, *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*⁷⁹ Such persons will find that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,*⁸⁰ who cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked.

The character of these *enemies of the cross of Christ* is completed by their being described as those *who mind earthly things*; that is, who *set their affection* (as the same word is elsewhere rendered) *on things on the earth*; and *not on things above*,⁸¹ as Christians profess and ought to do. These persons are characterized in our Saviour's parable of the sower as *such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*⁸² It behoves

⁷⁹ 2 Peter ii. 21. ⁸⁰ Heb. x. 31. ⁸¹ Col. iii. 2. ⁸² Mark iv. 19.

us to ask ourselves, since we profess and call ourselves Christians, On what are our affections fixed? The mind of the natural man is bounded by the things of earth. He cannot soar above the things of this world. He has no spiritual discernment. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*⁸³ It is by the objects upon which our minds are fixed, and after which our desires are directed, that we may learn to know ourselves.

The persons whose character the apostle describes, who caused him such pain and grief on account of their evil conduct, were, he said, *the enemies of the cross of Christ*. Such persons, in all ages of the church, notwithstanding they may bear the Christian name, and perhaps may imagine themselves to be good Christians, because of their ignorance of the Christian character as it is delineated in the word of God, yet are in truth the enemies of Christ. For they are living in opposition to His revealed will, in disobedience to His holy commandments. He is not their God, for they do not love and serve and obey Him. They love this present evil world. They serve its divers lusts and pleasures. They seek their portion in this life. And therefore when

⁸³ 1 Corinthians ii. 14.

*the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up,*⁸⁴ it will be found that their *end is destruction*. An awful end indeed ; but that in which the way of transgressors will assuredly terminate.

The apostle, having given this description of hypocritical professors of Christianity, and expressed his grief of heart on their account by the tears which overflowed from his eyes in weeping for them, proceeds to mention in the text the particulars in which he was anxious that the persons whom he addressed should be imitators of him, and followers of his example. He says of those who were Christians, not only in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth, *For our conversation is in heaven*. The word rendered *conversation*, is said by some to mean *citizenship*, and to intimate that the persons spoken of were citizens of heaven ; as it is said of them, *Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*.⁸⁵ Our Saviour directed His disciples to *rejoice because their names were written in heaven*,⁸⁶ rather than in any earthly privileges with which they might be favoured. It should be our greatest solicitude, our most anxious concern, to be numbered among the citizens of heaven ; to have God for our Father and heaven for our home ; rather than to obtain

⁸⁴ 2 Peter iii. 10. ⁸⁵ Hebrews xii. 22. ⁸⁶ Luke x. 20

any earthly benefit or distinction whatever. If this be our state and condition, *our conversation* also will be *in heaven*. Heaven is the great subject which occupies the minds of the children of God. Thither their affections soar; thither their hopes are directed. It is their privilege to live in spirit as it were in heaven. They realize the Divine presence of their heavenly Father by faith. They enjoy communion and fellowship with the Father of spirits; the greatest blessing with which a created being can be favoured. This maintaining intercourse with God, and living as in His presence at all times, which is the privilege of the Christian, through faith in his Redeemer, is what we may consider as being meant most especially by the expression, *Our conversation is in heaven*. Let us ask ourselves, Do we maintain this intercourse with our heavenly Father continually? Do we walk humbly with our God, and circumspectly before Him? If we be indeed *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*, God has sent forth the *Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father*.⁸⁷ We shall therefore look up to the God of heaven as our Father, who is reconciled to us by the death of His Son, and shall implore His continual protection and blessing; and we shall earnestly seek His grace to enable us to live day by day as His children, and to bear His image and likeness in our walk and conduct; that our whole demeanour

may be conformed to His holy mind and will, as it is revealed to us in His blessed word, and as it was exemplified in the character and conduct of His beloved Son. May we be followers of the apostles of Christ in like manner as they followed Him. May we walk in the footsteps of the flock of Christ, and feed beside the tent of our good Shepherd, having *our conversation in heaven*. Then we shall be truly happy in the enjoyment of His love, and in partaking of the blessings of His salvation. This is the Christian life upon earth; a life above the world, *hid with Christ in God*,⁸⁸ of which the people of the world have no conception. It is known only to those who can say with our apostle, *The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*.⁸⁷ May the blessedness of this life of faith be ours here on earth, that we may *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*⁸⁹ being our portion when we shall have done with all things here below.

To this subject of the future felicity of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle proceeds to refer. The Christian's expectations with regard to futurity are connected with his present enjoyments. While here on earth he looks up to heaven for protection and guidance and consolation day by day; he looks up to his Saviour

⁸⁷ Gal. iii. 26; iv. 6; ii. 20. ⁸⁸ Col. iii. 3. ⁸⁹ Rom. v. 2.

as his *High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, where He ever liveth to make intercession for them that come unto God by Him.*⁹⁰ So likewise it is said respecting this place of the abode of the blessed: *From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* We expect His coming from heaven, according to His promise to His disciples, *I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*⁹¹ And therefore it is said, *To them that look for Him, He shall appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.*⁹² We are dying creatures. Sin is the cause of this. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*⁹³ But the believer in Christ has a hope beyond the grave; a hope of more value than all that the world can give; a hope that will not make him ashamed in the great day of God, but will enable him to lift up his head with joy, because he will then enter upon eternal blessedness. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as a season of joy unutterable to His believing people, though of inconceivable terror to His enemies. He will *come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day;* but He will at the same time *take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not His gospel.*⁹³ He will come

⁹⁰ Heb. viii. 1; ix. 28. ⁹¹ John xiv. 3. ⁹² Rom. v. 12. ⁹³ 2Thess. i. 10, 8.

as the Judge of all the earth, and summon all mankind to appear before His tribunal. The secrets of all hearts will then be revealed, and *every one of us shall give account of himself to God*; and His *judgment will be according to truth*.⁹⁴ Let us ask ourselves, Can we endure the scrutiny of the Searcher of hearts, whose *eyes are as a flame of fire*?⁹⁵ Are we prepared to meet our God? *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner then appear*?⁹⁶ What will become of the open transgressor, or the secret offender? They will call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the all-seeing eye of the Judge of the living and the dead. But who is it that will then appear as the Judge of all? In the text it is said to be *the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*. He whose name was called *Jesus*, because *He should save His people from their sins*.⁹⁷ Blessed be His name, this is the character which He now sustains. He is the Saviour of sinners, the Deliverer from sin and all its consequences; from death and hell. They who are made acquainted with Him in this His gracious character now by faith, will then recognise Him as their Friend and their Redeemer, to the joy of their souls. Do we know Him as our Saviour? Are we saved from our sins by His grace? Is guilt removed from our consciences by faith in the blood

⁹⁴ Rom. xiv. 12; ii. 2. ⁹⁵ Rev. i. 14. ⁹⁶ 1 Peter iv. 18. ⁹⁷ Matt. i. 21.

of the Lamb of God? Has sin lost its dominion over us? Do we hate and avoid all sin? If we know Him as our Saviour, if we have been made partakers of the blessings of His great salvation, we shall, according to the language of our text, be *looking for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*; we shall be *waiting for His coming*.

The apostle mentions the nature of the blessedness which will be bestowed upon the believer in Christ at His appearing: *who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself*. What a change will that be! Those only will be partakers of it, whose hearts are changed by Divine grace, who are quickened from a death in trespasses and sins, and are *renewed in the spirit of their minds*, here on earth. These persons however, as long as they are in this world, are painfully sensible that their immortal spirits are the tenants of a vile body, a body of humiliation, on account of the sinfulness of which they are daily humbled before God; and are therefore led to *look to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*, for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace. It will be laid in the dust a *vile body*, but it will be raised a glorious body; for *we know*, said St. John, *that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*.⁹⁸ When the immortal spirit of the believer in Jesus quits this

tenement of clay, this vile body, it will *return to God who gave it*; but when *the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised*;⁹⁹ *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven*, and at His coming all mankind shall stand before His judgment seat; *when Christ, who is the life of His people shall appear*, in power and great glory, and *before Him shall be gathered all nations*,¹ then shall those who have believed through grace *appear with Him in glory*.² His almighty power will then be exercised in subduing and subjecting all things to Himself, in putting all His enemies under His feet, and punishing them for their rebellion against Him. And it will also be displayed in changing the vile and corruptible bodies of His believing people, that they *may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*. They shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, into His glorious image and likeness; *and so shall they ever be with the Lord. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*.¹

To this great and unspeakable blessedness the hopes and expectations of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are directed. For the coming of the day of God they are to be looking out continually; *looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour*

⁹⁸ 1 John iii. 2. ⁹⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 52. ¹ Matt. xxv. 32; xiii. 43. ² Col. iii. 4.

*Jesus Christ.*³ If we are among those who *love His appearing*, the text informs us that *our conversation will be in heaven* while we are here upon earth. Our thoughts and desires will be there. We shall walk with God as our Father who is in heaven, being accepted with Him in and through His beloved Son, our Saviour. We shall desire and pray and endeavour by His grace to walk so as to please God, and not as the *enemies of the cross of Christ*. We shall seek, in the midst of all the changes and uncertainties of this mortal life, to have our hopes and our hearts surely there fixed where true joys are to be found; that we may *walk worthy of God, who hath called us unto His kingdom and glory.*⁴ May this be indeed the state of our minds. Let us live above the world, having our hope laid up in heaven; and endeavouring, in our life and conduct, to glorify our heavenly Father; and thus manifest ourselves to be truly His children. The end of him that serveth God, and of him that serveth Him not, are both set before us in the Epistle for this day. Let these be kept before our eyes, that we may pursue the path that leads to happiness and God; and may come to those unspeakable joys which He hath prepared for them that unfeignedly love Him.

³ Titus ii. 13.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 12.

SERMON LIX.

FOR THE

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER.

Colossians i. 3, 4.

WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD, AND THE FATHER
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, PRAYING AL-
WAYS FOR YOU, SINCE WE HEARD OF YOUR
FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, AND OF THE LOVE
WHICH YE HAVE TO ALL THE SAINTS.

THE affection which the apostle Paul bore to his children in the gospel of Christ, and his ardent desire for their spiritual welfare, is very evident from the concern which he continually expresses for them in his various epistles. Thus he says to the Corinthians, *Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel; wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.*⁵ While he was thankful for the spiritual blessings

which his children in the faith of the gospel enjoyed, he prayed fervently for them, that they might justly appreciate their privileges, and might enjoy that consolation and happiness which true Christianity alone can impart, both in this life and in that which is to come. This he knew they would possess while they were *followers of him, as he also was of Christ.*⁵ And while he prayed for them; he earnestly intreated their prayers to God for him, and especially for his success in the work of the ministry which was committed to his trust. The Epistle for this day may be considered as containing,

First, The subject of the apostle's thanksgiving for the Colossian church; and,

Secondly, Of his prayers for them.

May the blessing of the Spirit of God rest upon us while our meditation is directed to them, that we may be truly thankful for the gifts of His bounty which we enjoy, and may be led to seek for those which we need and He has promised to bestow upon His church and people.

The apostle addressed his thanksgivings *to God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to Him who *so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;*⁶ to Him who is in Christ *the Father of mercies and the God of*

⁵ 1 Cor. iv. 15; xi. 1. ⁶ John iii. 16. ⁷ 2 Cor. i. 3.

*all comfort*⁷ to them that believe in His name. That which interested the apostle peculiarly in behalf of these persons whom he addressed, was their faith and love. *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints.* They were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had received the *faithful saying*, which is *worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*,⁸ and that in Him *we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin.* And having been made partakers of pardoning mercy through faith in Christ, the effect of it had been manifested in their conduct towards others; who, like themselves, had been turned *from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith in*⁹ Christ; for true *faith in Him worketh by love.*¹⁰

The subject of the apostle's thanksgiving on behalf of these persons, related to their future blessedness; *for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.* A hope of good things to come hereafter, when he has done with all things here below, is that which is set before the humble believer in Jesus. He is *begotten again to a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for*¹¹

⁸ 1 Tim. i. 15. ⁹ Acts xxvi. 18. ¹⁰ Gal. v. 6. ¹¹ 1 Peter i. 3, 4

him. *Christ dwells in his heart by faith*, and is in him *the hope of glory*. This hope is said to be *an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, which entereth into that within the vail, whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus*.¹² *The hope of salvation* is compared to a *helmet*, which protects the head of the soldier, and encourages him to lift it up boldly in the day of battle, and to *fight the good fight of faith*, that he may *lay hold on eternal life, whereunto he is called*.¹³ It is termed a *blessed hope*, for it will not meet with disappointment; but will most assuredly be realized to *the heirs of promise*.¹² The Surety of the covenant *is gone into heaven to prepare mansions for His believing people*; and has promised that *He will come again and receive them unto Himself, that where He is they may be also*.¹⁴

This hope is spoken of as that *whereof* they had *heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel*. It is the belief of the gospel of Christ which produces hope toward God; and *faith cometh by hearing*¹⁵ the glad tidings of pardon and salvation for perishing sinners, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. But there is such a thing as assenting to the truth of the gospel without being savingly benefited by it; and therefore the apostle speaks not only of its being heard, but also of its being *known in truth*. This is

¹² Heb. vi. 19, 20, 17. ¹³ 1 Tim. vi. 12. ¹⁴ John xiv. 3. ¹⁵ Rom. x. 17.

needful in order to a right reception of it. He says of this gospel, *which is come unto you, as it is in all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.* Our Saviour had commanded His disciples to *go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*¹⁶ In the course of its promulgation by His apostles, it had come to Colosse, and Divine power had accompanied the preaching of it, so that it had not been heard in vain. The grace of God was known in truth; the truth was received in the love of it, and had brought forth fruit. *The fruit of the Spirit*¹⁷ had been manifested in the lives and conduct of those who had heard the gospel, so that evidence had been given by them of the blessedness of being made acquainted with it. Unless the word of God, which we hear, bring forth fruit in us, *the peaceable fruit of righteousness,*¹⁸ to His glory and praise, it is evident that we do not and cannot *know the grace of God in truth.* Although our minds have been informed respecting it, yet our hearts are unaffected by it, and therefore we are not truly under its influence.

The apostle, in order more powerfully to win their affections, speaks to them in a kind manner of the person who had been the instrument of making known to them, or of confirming them

¹⁶ Mark xvi. 15. ¹⁷ Galatians v. 22. ¹⁸ Hebrews xii. 11.

in the knowledge of Divine truth: *As ye also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.* It appears that Epaphras was a fellow prisoner with the apostle Paul at Rome. He speaks of him in the epistle to Philemon, as his *fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus*;¹⁹ and at the close of this epistle, passes a high encomium on his character, and a testimony of the interest which he took in their spiritual welfare. *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God; for I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you.*²⁰

Here the apostle expresses his affectionate regard for his fellow prisoner, and shows how highly he appreciated his labours as a minister of Christ; and reminds them that he had been the bearer of the intelligence of the effect produced among them by the belief of the gospel: *who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit*; or the affection which they bore to the apostle as the instrument employed to convey to them the gospel of the grace of God. The religion of Christ, when it is truly received into the heart, is a religion of love. It causes love to God and man, proceeding from the blessed influence of the Spirit of God upon the soul. *The fruit of the Spirit is*

¹⁹ Philemon 23.²⁰ Col. iv. 12, 13.²¹ Gal. v. 22, 6.

*love. Faith worketh by love.*²¹ The love which they had manifested towards the apostle, was an evidence to him of their hearty reception of the doctrines of Christianity, which he had made known to them. This led him to give thanks to God on their behalf, as he said he was accustomed to do. Love to God and His children is a distinguishing feature in true Christianity.

Our apostle having thus expressed his thankfulness to God on account of the Colossians, that they gave undoubted evidence that they had received the gospel of Christ in the love of it, makes mention further of the interest which he took in their welfare, so that he prayed for them. The subject of his prayer to God on their behalf was to be noticed in the

Second place. He begins, *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.* Joy filled the heart of the apostle when he heard of the success of the gospel of Christ. He prayed for those who had received the truth in the love of it; and this not only once or twice, but constantly and incessantly. He was particularly anxious for them, that they might be *filled with the knowledge of the will of God.* This is made known to us in His holy word, which is the revelation of His will. If then we desire to be *filled with the knowledge of His will*, we shall

search the holy scriptures, that we may derive from them *the wisdom that is from above.*²² And we shall study them with prayer for a spiritual understanding of their important contents to be given to us, that we may not only be made acquainted with the theory of Divine truth, but that our hearts may be affected by it, and our life and conduct may be regulated according to the will of God in all things. The whole Bible is the revelation of the will of God to man. There is no true wisdom but that which is derived from it. It is *able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*²³ The more scriptural knowledge a man has, the more real wisdom will he possess. But a great deal of this may be obtained without having a spiritual understanding. A man may have a critical acquaintance with a great part of the scriptures, and be very wise through the knowledge which he has acquired, without having any spiritual understanding or discernment of the will of God. Both of these are requisite for us; *wisdom* derived from research and the use of our intellectual faculties on the subjects which are revealed to us in the word of God; and a *spiritual understanding* received from God the Holy Spirit, by means of fervent prayer for His blessing upon our reading and meditation on His holy

²² James iii. 17.

²³ 2 Timothy iii. 15.

word, that our wills and affections may be subjected to it, that we may derive personal benefit from it. A *spiritual understanding* of the will of God is His gift; and unless this be vouchsafed to us, all other knowledge will be of no avail to our eternal salvation. All other knowledge puffeth up. This alone humbles a man in the dust before God. While it makes known to him things which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man*,²⁴ it shows him that he has nothing in himself whereof to boast; and leads him to glory only in the Lord, and in the riches of His mercy and grace. While then it is incumbent upon us to obtain, as far as possible, that *wisdom* which is derived from a knowledge of the will of God by the use of our rational faculties in the study of His holy word, it also becomes us to seek for *spiritual understanding* in fervent prayer at the throne of grace, that we may be *perfect and complete in all the will of God*;²⁵ without which the wisdom which we may derive from the word of God itself, will not profit us to our eternal salvation.

The apostle therefore prayed for the Colossians, that their knowledge of the revealed will of God might be thus applied: *that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge*

²⁴ 1 Corinthians ii. 9.

²⁵ Colossians iv. 12.

of God. It is highly important that the walk or conduct of those who profess to believe the gospel of Christ should be suitable to their profession. The necessity of this is inculcated in every part of the holy scriptures. Thus God is glorified, His name is honoured, His doctrine is adorned, and true religion is promoted. It is grievous when the conduct of Christians is inconsistent with their profession. Even the Holy Spirit is said to be grieved²⁶ with it, speaking after the manner of men. The true Christian's prayer and endeavour is, to *walk so as to please God*, to be *fruitful in every good work*, to do all those things which God has commanded His people to do for their good and for His glory. While his practice is conformed to the commandments of God, his desire will be to increase in the knowledge of God, to have fellowship with Him. The more *our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*,²⁷ the more happy shall we be. This is indeed heaven upon earth.

But in order to our walk and conduct being regulated according to the will of God, and to our enjoying communion with Him, we must be endued with power from on high, because we are unable of ourselves to do these things. Therefore the apostle prays that believers in Christ might be *strengthened with all might* by the Spirit

²⁶ Ephesians iv. 30.

²⁷ 1 John i. 3.

of God, *according to His glorious power*, that Divine power and might and strength might be communicated to them to enable them to do this, because human strength is unequal to it. But having Divine strength vouchsafed to them, they would be enabled to do what is required with *patience and longsuffering* all the days of their life, and with *joyfulness* and gratitude to their heavenly Father for His grace bestowed upon them. These are two points in the Christian character, which demand our attention. It is said, *Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*²⁸ The patience of the Christian is frequently called into exercise. He needs therefore to look to *the God of patience*²⁹ for it, in the time of need, that *patience may have her perfect work, that he may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*³⁰

But in the midst of all the trials and difficulties to which he may be exposed, it is his privilege to have *joy and peace in believing*³¹ the promises of God, and to cultivate a thankful spirit. *Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.* The lot or portion of his inheritance is, through Divine goodness, among the saints of God; among those who *are the children of light, and the children of the day; and are not of the*

²⁸ Heb. x. 26. ²⁹ Rom. xv. 5. ³⁰ James i. 4. ³¹ Rom. xv. 13.

*night nor of darkness.*³² He is *delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.* The Father of mercies has, by His grace and the influence of His Holy Spirit, called him out of darkness into His marvellous light; *for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in his heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ;*³³ and thus hath made him meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. He has received forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in³⁴ Christ Jesus, or by believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Oh, what a cause of thankfulness is this! What gratitude and praise should fill the hearts of those, who are admitted to the enjoyment of this high privilege, of being numbered among the saints of God here on earth, who walk in the light of His countenance, who is their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, and of being permitted to look forward to *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, which is reserved in heaven for them; and for which they are kept by the power of God through faith, so that they shall receive the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls,*³⁵ in His eternal kingdom and glory.

³² 1 Thess. v. 5. ³³ 2 Cor. iv. 6. ³⁴ Acts xxvi. 18. ³⁵ 1 Peter i. 4.

As the apostle gave thanks to God on behalf of the Christians at Colosse, he also prayed that they might give thanks themselves for the benefits which the Father of mercies had conferred upon them. If we *are children of the light and of the day*,³⁶ who walk in the light of the countenance of our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, who walk humbly with our God, in communion and fellowship with Him, by prayer and praise, seeking for spiritual and heavenly blessings, desiring to have these for our portion in this life; it is our privilege to be always giving thanks to our heavenly Father, for His goodness to us in making us meet by His grace for such an inheritance, by quickening us from a death in trespasses and sins to newness of life. Let us then live up to our high privilege. Let us *pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks, since this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning*³⁶ His believing people. And let us look forward beyond the privileges of the church of Christ on earth to the inheritance of the church triumphant in heaven, where *the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever; where the city hath no need of the sun neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof; and the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it, and*

³⁶ 1 Thessalonians v. 17, 18.

*there shall be no night there.*³⁷ The light which shines upon the believer in Christ in this life, is only *seen through a glass darkly.*³⁸ But when he is admitted into the heavenly inheritance of the redeemed from among men, then *with open face beholding as in a glass or mirror the glory of the Lord,*³⁹ he will reflect the glorious image of his God for evermore; for *then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*⁴⁰ Let prayer and praise to God in Christ be our employment here below, and we may believe that when the worship of the church on earth shall issue in songs of triumph, when time with us shall be no more, we shall be admitted to join in the song of praise to God and the Lamb throughout eternity.

We have now considered the subjects of the apostle's thanksgivings to God, and of his supplications for those in whose spiritual welfare he was deeply interested. Let us ask ourselves, Are we partakers of the spiritual blessings which he thanked God were the portion of *the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse*? Is our *hope laid up in heaven*? Have we a *good hope through grace* that, whenever we shall be called out of this world, the blessedness of heaven will be our eternal portion? This is a subject which it becomes us seriously to consider; for to have

³⁷ Rev. xxii. 5. ³⁸ 1 Cor. xiii. 12. ³⁹ 2 Cor. iii. 18. ⁴⁰ Matt. xiii. 43.

a hope laid up in heaven, is indeed the only thing worth living for. It appears that *faith in Christ Jesus and love to all the saints*, as an evidence of the reality of this faith, is the basis of this hope. We can have no good hope of heavenly happiness hereafter, unless we are truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who in Him *have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*⁴¹ If our faith be in Him, and our love to Him, and to His people for His sake, we may regard Him as our hope for salvation. And if this be the case with us, the prayer which the apostle offered for the Christians at Colosse will be that which we shall offer up for ourselves, with an earnest desire that we may receive the blessings here sought. We shall be desirous to know the will of God as it is revealed in His holy word, in order that we may live in obedience to it. We shall be anxious to have a *spiritual understanding* of all Divine truth, that we may be made *wise unto salvation*, and may enjoy the consolations which God is pleased to give to His waiting people. It will also be our great care that our walk and conduct may be suitable to our Christian character; that while men take knowledge of us as the servants of God, they may have no evil thing to say of us. We shall desire to appear to all the world as *trees of righteousness, the*

⁴¹ Colossians i. 14.

*planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified,*⁴² or to be fruitful in every good work; and in order that our profiting may appear unto all men, we shall seek to *increase in the knowledge of God*, by means of His word, and by the teaching of His Spirit. And while we are sensible of our own weakness and inability to contend with our spiritual enemies in our own strength, we shall pray to be *strengthened with might in the inner man*,⁴³ to *fight the good fight of faith*,⁴⁴ and to *run with patience the race that is set before us*,⁴⁵ that we may patiently and joyfully serve God, and glorify and praise His holy name. We shall be thankful for the spiritual blessings of which we are partakers; we shall desire and pray for more; and we shall look forward in hope to the enjoyment of greater blessedness than can be known in this world, when we have done with all things here below. Let us meditate upon these subjects of prayer and thanksgiving, that we may seek for and receive the great blessings which are here spoken of; and may rejoice in hope of heavenly blessedness being our portion in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

⁴² Isaiah lxi. 3. ⁴³ Eph. iii. 16. ⁴⁴ 1 Tim. v. 12. ⁴⁵ Heb. xii. 1.

SERMON LX.

FOR

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jeremiah xxiii. 5, 6.

BEHOLD THE DAYS COME, SAITH THE LORD,
THAT I WILL RAISE UNTO DAVID A RIGHT-
EOUS BRANCH, AND A KING SHALL REIGN
AND PROSPER, AND SHALL EXECUTE JUDG-
MENT AND JUSTICE IN THE EARTH. IN
HIS DAYS JUDAH SHALL BE SAVED, AND
ISRAEL SHALL DWELL SAFELY; AND THIS IS
HIS NAME WHEREBY HE SHALL BE CALLED,
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

INSTEAD of the usual portion of scripture taken
from the apostolical epistles, our church has
appointed a passage to be read on this Sunday,
selected from the prophecies of Jeremiah, in
which the coming of Christ, the great Deliverer
of His people, is foretold. In directing this to

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be read always on the Sunday before Advent, she closes the ecclesiastical year with the same subject as she commences it, exulting in the theme towards which the patriarchs and prophets of the old testament directed their expectations, and of which the Evangelists relate the fulfilment.

The prophet Jeremiah having described in the text the character which the Messiah would sustain, afterwards intimates that the blessings which should be bestowed by Him would be so great, that even the deliverance from Egypt, which was the most important benefit that the Israelites had ever received, would be overlooked and almost forgotten in comparison with it. *Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.* This was an event so big with blessings to the nation, such a wonderful interference of God on behalf of His people, that it was never to be forgotten. It was referred to again and again by Moses, as a motive for national obedience, and an undoubted evidence that the Lord was their God. He said, *Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence; therefore I command thee to do this thing;*⁴⁶ that is, to be compassionate and kind to the poor and needy, *the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.*

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy xxiv. 18.

It is recorded that at the time of the delivery of the law of the ten commandments, as a reason why they should love and fear God, and not walk contrary to Him : *God spake all these words and said, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage : Thou shalt have no other gods before Me ;* and so on. This memorable deliverance the prophet here foretells should be forgotten, or little thought of in comparison, because of an event which was so much greater and more remarkable. They would leave off commemorating the deliverance from Egypt, an act which demonstrated the power and goodness of the God of Israel, and would say, *The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them ; and they shall dwell in their own land.* This has been usually interpreted as relating to the return of the Jews from Babylon. But it is remarkable that their return from that captivity has never yet been celebrated by them in the manner here foretold ; however it might have been commemorated for a season. The prophecy has therefore been considered by Christian commentators to relate to the benefits received through the coming of the Messiah subsequently to the Babylonish captivity, of which the Jews are as yet insensible.

From the manner however in which the de-

liverance is here spoken of, the prophet seems rather to look forward in a rapid transition to the glory of the latter day; when the Israelites shall hail the coming of Christ, and be collected from the various countries in which they are now dispersed all over the world; and *shall again dwell in their own land*; when, as the prophet Hosea says, *The children of Israel shall return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.*⁴⁷ This will be so wonderful an event, that the deliverance from Egypt will be forgotten in the joy that it will occasion. But this is an event, which even now, eighteen centuries after the appearing of Christ in the world, seems to be so hopeless, that it is acknowledged nothing short of Divine power can accomplish it; and nothing but the multiplied declarations of scripture afford any reason for believing that it will take place in the fulness of time. But the sure word of God cannot fail of its accomplishment. It shall be fulfilled in its season. It was therefore said by an excellent prelate, who was well versed in the scriptures,⁴⁸ “Undoubtedly that people of the Jews shall once more be commanded to arise and shine, and their return shall be the riches of the Gentiles; and that shall be a more glorious time than ever the church of God did yet behold.” And

⁴⁷ Hosea iii. 5.⁴⁸ Archbishop Leighton on Isaiah lx. 1.

he adds, "They forget a main point of the church's glory, that pray not daily for the conversion of the Jews." This is a subject then which should not be lost sight of by the children of God. The text is to be considered as having a peculiar reference to it; and should call forth our prayers for its fulfilment.

The characters which our Lord Jesus Christ was to sustain, are here set before us also for our encouragement. Let us direct our attention to them with prayer that we may partake of the blessing which the description given was designed to convey to the church and people of God. May we receive Him into our hearts as our Saviour, and put our trust in His righteousness as that which can alone render us acceptable to God, that we may live under His government as our King; and then we shall know that our Judge is our Friend, and we shall not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

The text commences with a note of admiration: *Behold!* which is as much as to say, the subject to be introduced is one of the utmost importance. Such the coming of the Messiah was esteemed by the people of God under the old testament dispensation. The subject to which their attention was directed, is, *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch.* Under the same character Isaiah foretold the coming of Christ. *There shall*

*come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. He was to grow up before the Lord as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground;*⁴⁹ *as a young shoot springing anew from an old root, which had been supposed to have long since perished in the ground. When our Saviour appeared, the glory of the house of David had long passed away. The tree was cut down, but the roots were left in the ground, unseen, unnoticed; from which, at the appointed time, the righteous Branch was to spring up, unexpectedly, and unheeded even by those who were the depositaries of the prophecies which went before concerning Him. But although He was despised and rejected of men,*⁴⁹ *on account of the meanness of His appearance, yet of this righteous Branch Zechariah had prophesied, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the Man, whose name is the Branch, and He shall grow up out of His place, or branch up from under Him, as from a root under ground and out of sight, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; even He shall build the temple of the Lord, and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.*⁵⁰

The same royal character is ascribed in the text to the *righteous Branch of David*. It is said

⁴⁹ Isaiah xi. 1; liii. 2, 3. ⁵⁰ Zech. vi. 12. ⁵¹ Mark xvi. 19, 20.

of Him, *A King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.* These prophecies have never been fulfilled in a temporal sense, as the Jews expected they would be, and as they continue to expect to the present hour. But they have been fulfilled in a spiritual sense, by the setting up of the kingdom of Christ upon earth, through the preaching of His blessed gospel, and the effusion of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual reign of Christ may be said to have commenced in an especial manner on the day of Pentecost, when *the Spirit was poured from on high* upon His apostles, and they began to proclaim the glory and majesty of their risen Lord and Saviour, according to His command, at Jerusalem, with such effect, that three thousand persons on that day believed the word of the Lord, and were baptized into the faith of Christ. It prospered when the *apostles and prophets and teachers went forth*, as He directed them, *and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* Then it was manifested that the Lord Jesus had *all power in heaven and on earth*, after *He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God,*⁵¹ as the *King of kings, and Lord of lords.* The progress that Christianity made in the first ages of the church was truly astonishing; the triumphs it obtained over the idolatrous nations, which at the time of its introduction into the world were

sitting in darkness, and the shadow of death, were most wonderful. Judgment was in many instances executed on its adversaries in a remarkable manner; as in the cases of Elymas, the sorcerer, and of king Herod.⁵² Justice was dispensed in the deliverance of the oppressed from the power of their persecutors; as when Peter was delivered out of prison. Wherever Christianity extended its triumphs, justice and equity ever prevailed in its train. Men *turned from the worship of idols of wood and stone, to serve the living and true God,*⁵³ and to live in holiness and righteousness before Him, in obedience to His holy will and commandments. In process of time however the love of those who bore the Christian name waxed cold; and *darkness again covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.*⁵⁴ But it pleased God to cause the light of truth once more to dawn upon the world, at the time of the blessed Reformation; when our country was freed from the intolerable yoke of Popery, which had before overwhelmed it with superstition and misery; and the Lord Jesus Christ was owned as the Head of His church amongst us, to whom *every knee must bow, and every tongue confess*⁵⁵ His power and glory. May He ever reign in our land as our King and Lord, and His kingdom be established in the midst of us.

⁵² Acts xii. 23; xiii. 11. ⁵³ 1 Thess. i. 9. ⁵⁴ Isa. lx. 2. ⁵⁵ Rom. xiv. 11.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of in the text however, not only as a mighty and successful King, but also as a Saviour. *In His days shall Judah be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely.* This declaration is supposed to relate primarily to the conversion of the Jews to the faith of Christ. But in a spiritual sense we may consider it as referring to those of whom it is said, *If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*⁵⁶ The subjects of His spiritual kingdom *shall be saved.* Salvation has respect to danger, from which it is a deliverance. Believers in Christ are made partakers of His great salvation. They are delivered from the power of Satan, so that he is not permitted to hold them in subjection to his dominion. They are delivered from sin in its guilt and its power in this life; and from its consequences, the punishment denounced against it in eternity. The God of heaven declares respecting them, *Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*⁵⁷ *I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.*⁵⁸ Salvation from sin is a blessing of unspeakable value. *The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin.*⁵⁹ Not however in order to encourage in any way a careless continuance in sin. This is not the object proposed by the redemption of

⁵⁶ Gal. iii. 29. ⁵⁷ Heb. viii. 12. ⁵⁸ Isa. xlv. 22. ⁵⁹ 1 John i. 7.

Christ. It affords no countenance to iniquity. But that those who are cleansed from their sins by faith in the blood of the Lamb of God, may *go and sin no more*; that being *washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,*⁶⁰ they may manifest themselves to *be the children of their Father which is in heaven,*⁶¹ by walking *in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of their life,*⁶² and may be conformed to the image of Christ in all their conduct.

It is also said of the Israel of God, that they *shall dwell safely*, or in full confidence and security. They shall have a place of refuge to flee to, where they shall be safe under the protection of their King and Lord. This is the blessedness of those who have the Lord for their God, or who have Christ for their King. *In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and His children shall have a place of refuge.*⁶³ *God is their refuge and strength.* Their King is their mighty Protector, their strong tower of defence, from all their enemies; their Saviour, who will *deliver them from every evil work, and will preserve them unto His heavenly kingdom.* They may therefore have full confidence in Him, as their Protector from all evil, and the Giver of every good and perfect gift, which His infinite wisdom sees to be for their

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. vi. 11. ⁶¹ Matt. v. 45. ⁶² Luke i. 75. ⁶³ Prov. xiv. 26.

benefit. They may safely repose themselves upon His care, and be confident that Satan shall not prevail against them, sin shall not have dominion over them, the world shall not overcome them; because their almighty King will never fail them, nor forsake them; but will hear and defend them, when they call upon Him for aid in the time of their need.

The way in which they become interested in these blessings, is intimated by the name which the prophet ascribes to their mighty Protector. *This is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.* The ancient Jewish commentators are said to have applied this prophecy to the Messiah. That the title here ascribed to the *righteous Branch* of *David* properly belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, is the glory of the Christian church. In this title both His Divine and His human nature are referred to. He is declared to be JEHOVAH, the self-existent God, and He is said to save His people by becoming their *righteousness*. In similar language the prophet Isaiah represents God as speaking of His people, *Their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord*; and therefore observing, *Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength*; and concluding, *In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*⁶⁴ In like manner the apostle Paul says of our Lord Jesus Christ, that *He of God is made*

unto us righteousness ; and, we are made the righteousness of God in Him. And the way in which this is brought to pass is stated, when it is said, *By the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.*⁶⁵ It is as the Saviour of His people that He becomes our righteousness. Therefore when He was about to appear in our world in the likeness of sinful flesh, it was Divinely directed respecting Him, that *His name* should be called JESUS, which is said to be of the same import with EMMANUEL, *God with us*, because *He* should *save His people from their sins.*⁶⁶ *This is the great mystery of godliness* and of redemption, that *God was manifest in the flesh.*⁶⁷ Jehovah became man, that in human nature He might be obedient to His own law ; and the merit of His obedience might be imputed to the ungodly, to sinners, who in penitence and faith should put their trust in it for justification and acceptance in the sight of that infinitely Holy One, who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity ;*⁶⁸ and being *reconciled to God by the death of His Son,*⁶⁹ might enjoy pardon and peace.

This doctrine lies at the foundation of the Christian religion. It is the article by the belief of which the church stands, or by the rejection of which it falls. There is no way of access for the sinful children of men into the

⁶⁴ Is. xlv. 24, 25. ⁶⁵ Rom. v. 19. ⁶⁶ Matt. i. 21, 23. ⁶⁷ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

Divine presence, but through faith in THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. And therefore those who do not put their trust in the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of their hope for acceptance with God, cannot have fellowship with Him. They cannot know God as their reconciled Father. They cannot be admitted to appear in His presence. For none but the righteous can approach Him. *God heareth not sinners*⁷⁰ as such. And there is *none* of the fallen race of Adam who are *righteous* in themselves, *no, not one*.⁷¹ “We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.” This is the doctrine of the Church of England in her Eleventh Article. It is the doctrine of the holy scriptures; and therefore it is most important to have a right understanding of it. It is enlarged upon in the Homily of salvation; in which it is said, “Our justification doth come of the mere mercy of God; and of so great and free mercy, that whereas all the world was not able of themselves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father of His infinite mercy, without any our desert or deserving, to prepare for us the most precious jewels of Christ’s body and blood; whereby our ransom might be fully paid; the law fulfilled, and His justice fully satisfied. So

⁶⁸ Hab. i. 13. ⁶⁹ Rom. v. 10. ⁷⁰ John ix. 31. ⁷¹ Rom. iii. 10.

that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in Him. He for them paid their ransom by His death. He for them fulfilled the law in His life. So that now in Him and by Him every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law, forasmuch as what their infirmity lacked, Christ's justice (or righteousness) hath supplied." A right understanding of this doctrine of Divine revelation, is needful in order to our walking humbly with our God. We cannot maintain intercourse with Him under a consciousness of the sin that dwelleth in us, unless we are assured of our acceptance with Him. It is only for the sake of our *Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family of God in heaven and earth is named*,⁷² that we can draw nigh to God. *This is His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased for His righteousness' sake*, because of His having *magnified the law and made it honourable*,⁷³ by His obedience to its holy and just commands. He is our *Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and the propitiation for our sins*,⁷⁴ in reliance upon whose merits alone we can draw nigh to God, and be assured that He will draw nigh to us as the Hearer and Answerer of our humble supplications at His mercy seat. His name was to be called THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS for this purpose, that we might

⁷² Ephesians iii. 15. ⁷³ Isaiah xlii. 21. ⁷⁴ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

see every barrier to our admission into the Divine presence removed; and might therefore be encouraged to *pray without ceasing*, and in *every thing to give thanks*, since *this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning*⁷⁵ those who believe in the name of His only begotten Son.

It behoves us then to inquire, Is our reliance placed on *the Lord our Righteousness* for the enjoyment of reconciliation with God, and communion and fellowship with Him? Is it *in the Lord* that we *have righteousness and strength*? righteousness for justification in His sight, and strength to enable us to live in obedience to His holy will and commandments, and to resist the enemies of our souls' peace and salvation? It is thus only that sinful men can be justified with God. Through *the Lord our righteousness* there is *access with confidence by the faith of Him* into the Divine presence, and *boldness*⁷⁶ or liberty of speech, to implore pardoning mercy for our daily offences, and sanctifying grace according to our need. This is the way in which alone Divine blessings are to be obtained by sinful men. Through Him the storehouse of Divine grace is opened for needy sinners to come and receive a rich supply of all spiritual blessings, and every needful temporal benefit which Divine wisdom sees fit to bestow. And the command given to

⁷⁵ 1 Thessalonians v. 17, 18.

⁷⁶ Ephesians iii. 12.

the believer in Christ who pleads His righteousness for acceptance at the throne of grace is, *Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*⁷⁷ Thus, drawing near to the throne of grace, they are made partakers of the salvation of God, which consists in being delivered from the power of evil, and being put in possession of every good, which *the God of all grace* sees fit to bestow upon the suppliants at His footstool. They *dwell safely*, or in perfect security, making Him their refuge in the time of their trouble. They experience His mighty protection as their King, who will shield them from the power of their enemies. And they are assured that He will execute judgment for them on Satan and his angels.

Such are the blessings derived to the children of men from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *righteous Branch of David*. Those who put their trust in Him, shall be blessed by Him, both here and hereafter. Let us seek for an interest in His righteousness and salvation, that we may enjoy the blessings which flow from partaking of them; and walking humbly with our God, depending upon His grace for the supply of all our need, may rejoice in hope of being blessed at His right hand with fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

⁷⁷ John xvi. 24.

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